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Iron Fellows: Commitment and Activism in a Poor People's Movement

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Iron Fellows: Commitment and Activism in a Poor People's Movement

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Dedication

To Lindsey

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Iron Fellows: Commitment and Activism in a Poor People's Movement

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Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork, life history interviews, and an extensive review of secondary sources and databases, this dissertation studies the experiences of activists in the unemployed worker's movement in Argentina, also known as the *piqueteros*. My goal is to explain three puzzles: (1) why some participants develop a strong commitment to their groups while others withdraw; (2) how the experience of mobilization relates to other aspects of activist's lives; and (3) the ways in which these dynamics affected the overall trajectory of the movement.

Addressing these empirical questions allows us to complement the current literature on social movement participation. Although there is a substantial body of research on the factors that contribute to a person's engagement in contention, many more studies focus on the recruitment phase than on the long-term trajectories of activists. Consequently, we know a great deal about the conditions that make participation more likely, but we are less knowledgeable about the process by which people develop commitment (or not) to

the organizations they have joined. I argue that answering this question requires us to engage in a broader debate concerning the sources of social action. In other words, in order to understand sustained activism we must first explore the ways in which partaking in an activity becomes an end in itself. Since the mechanisms that attach people to contentious politics are also present in other instances of collective life, we can draw clues from areas of sociology, beyond the limits of the field of social movement studies.

In addition, this dissertation sheds light on relevant processes currently taking place in Latin America. The consolidation of democracy rule in the region during the last three decades coincided with a retrenchment of the welfare. This has led to large-scale protests and the development of new forms of collective action, of which the piqueteros are just one example. Exploring the experiences of rank-and-file members in these movements is essential to understand their potential as sources of social change, and thus their capacity to contribute to a stable and inclusive political regime.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Olivia[1] was in a desperate situation. Her husband had sunk into addiction and did not contribute anymore to the sustenance of the family. Gone were the times when the man's small shop provided for a decent standard of living: his increasingly frequent absences from the household left Olivia without food for her children. To make things worse, economic conditions in the country were worsening, and there were fewer and fewer jobs available for people like her. Witnessing this situation, a neighbor invited her one day to participate in a grassroots organization. Olivia had limited experience with politics and did not know much about the group, but she knew it distributed food among its members and put them on a waitlist for positions in workfare programs. For many months she took part in demonstrations and meetings, overcoming the resistance of her husband, who used physical violence to stop her from participating, until she eventually got a small subsidy. Many years later, today she is one of the most enthusiastic members of the organization. She spends all day there, dealing with paperwork and participating in meetings. She has also accumulated vast experience in protests: days and days spent blocking roads, miles and miles of marches under the sun or rain, and countless standoffs with the police.

Around the same time as Olivia, but in another slum, Omar joined an organization that ran a soup kitchen. He was jobless and the group helped him feed his two children.

[1] Throughout the dissertation, the names of respondents have been replaced by pseudonyms. All interview excerpts have been translated from Spanish by me.

He knew some of the leaders from growing up, and trusted them. A few months after joining, a police bullet killed one of his fellows during a demonstration. The episode was terrifying and distressing, but increased Omar's determination to remain involved. However, a few months later he was offered a job outside of town. His wife told him to decide between his activism and his family. He chose the latter and left the movement.

Olivia and Omar are among the countless people involved in the unemployed worker's movement in Argentina. During the late 1990s, groups of activists began to organize workers who had been laid off in order to demand access to jobs and relief programs. Their method of protest gave the movement its name: piqueteros, or "road blockers". The membership of these organizations grew rapidly in their early years, peaked at the time of the economic collapse of 2001-2002, and subsided afterwards as overall living conditions improved. Nevertheless, they continue to fulfill a crucial role in neighborhoods all across the country, and remain a visible actor in Argentinean politics.

This movement provides an excellent opportunity for studying the ways in which poor people engage in collective action – and disengage from it. In particular, the trajectories of its members pose an intriguing puzzle. At the moment of joining, the profile of most recruits hardly matches the one that according to the literature is conducive to sustained activism: Most of them are extremely poor, uneducated, and have a very limited sense of collective efficacy. Moreover, the vast majority enters a piquetero organization not due to ideological affinity, but simply because it offers a way to obtain

material resources. However, after recruitment their trajectories begin to differ. While some leave as soon as alternative ways of making ends meet are available, others stay and become increasingly committed, engaging in substantial efforts to remain involved.

Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork that spanned three and a half years, life history interviews with activists[2], and an extensive review of secondary sources and databases, this dissertation studies the lives of people like Olivia and Omar, and connect their diverse experiences with transformations in Argentinean politics and society. Why do some people in this movement develop a strong attachment to the cause, while others in a similar situation disengage? What is the relation between their practices while mobilized and other aspects of their lives, past and present? How have the experiences of these men and women influenced the trajectory of the piquetero movement since its emergence?

Moreover, I use the case of the piqueteros to analyze an area of social movements that has received relatively limited attention: the persistence of activism. Collective action is costly, demanding and frequently unsuccessful. Not surprisingly, then, most people rarely participate in social movements. However, there are those who do participate, even in the worst circumstances, and who value mobilization to such a degree

[2] I interviewed a total of 153 people associated with the piquetero movement. 10 of them were national leaders in the movement. 104 were activists with a trajectory that denotes a high level of attachment to an organization. 9 had been recruited recently (two years or less). 15 can be classified, based on their statements during interviews and their subsequent trajectory, as potential dropouts: members who expected to withdraw when the opportunity for it arose. Finally, 15 respondents were dropouts: people who at the time of our last interview were either outside of the movement, or in the process of withdrawing.

that they remain involved when others drop out. Research has focused on the characteristics that separate such individuals from their more acquiescent peers, seeking to identify the personal features that are more common among long-term activists. However, the connection between these attributes and actual behavior at the individual level is weak: people with the same profile participate at remarkably different levels. I argue that a way to address this limitation is to conceive of activism first and foremost as a practice. We need to center on what people do in a social movement, and study how individuals come to see such behavior as meaningful and enjoyable.

Exploring the trajectories of individuals in a social movement is not only an intrinsically relevant research question: it also offers ways to understand larger scale processes of mobilization. As Jocelyn Viterna (2013) argues in her recent study of women guerrillas in El Salvador, analyzing the diverse experiences of activists allows us to understand why and how societal-level factors and developments affect the actions of certain people but not others. In addition, the internal dynamics of social movement groups, particularly the reasons why people join, stay in, and leave them, are central to their organizational trajectories.

Analyzing the mechanisms that sustain activism also has important implications for democratic governance. Social movements are an essential tool for marginalized and disenfranchised groups to articulate their demands and petition the authorities. Long term organizers serve as the connectors between different experiences of contention, and prove

essential for the emergence of new movements from the remains of older ones. In other words, these individuals are the ones that keep mobilization alive during quiescent times, providing the impetus, resources and networks for future episodes of protests.

In few parts of the world this issue is as crucial as in Latin America today. The consolidation of democratic rule in the region during the last three decades coincided with a retrenchment of the welfare state and the abolition of long-standing labor and social rights. This has led to large-scale protests and the development of new forms of collective action. In addition, the influence of social movements in the early 21st century has expanded as political elites in many countries incorporated segments of them into their coalitions of support. Exploring the experiences of rank-and-file members in these movements is essential to understand their potential as sources of social change, and thus their capacity to contribute to a stable and inclusive political regime.

The following chapters address these questions from three different angles. Chapter two looks at the *why* of political involvement: why do some people participate in contention, while others in a similar situation do not? I focus on the ways in which a person's biography and activism interact to generate a sense of enjoyment. In my case of study, being in a piquetero organization solves a series of deficits in participant's lives, which leads some of them to see mobilization as an end in itself. Chapter three centers on the *how* of this process: what are the mechanisms through which a person comes to appreciate activism? I advocate for centering on the role of practices, rather than on the

importance of worldviews. In other words, not only what people think matters, but also what they do. For the case of the piqueteros, I demonstrate that routines in the movement allow participants to recreate, develop and protect the routines associated with a diminishing working-class lifestyle. Finally, chapter four connects the development of commitment with the trajectory of a social movement. I contend that in the case of Argentina, organizations in the unemployed workers movement have not declined, as the vast majority of the literature argues. Instead, their core structures have strengthened: most of these groups now have more state recognition, organizational resources, know-how, and in particular, networks of deeply dedicated members. The relative decrease in their street presence is only the most visible aspect of their recent history. Beneath that appearance of demise lays a thick network of groups and activists ready to mobilize in defense of their right to a decent standard of living.

Social movement theory and the question of long-term involvement

The emergence of collective action has received far more scholarly attention than its sustainment and decline (Voss 1996; Owens 2009). Studies at the individual level are in a similar situation: most research centers on the variables that contribute to recruitment, with far less attention devoted to what happens afterwards (for exceptions see Goodwin 1997; Klandermans 1997; Klatch 2004; Nepstad 2004; Munson 2008; Gould 2009; Saunders *et al* 2012; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2012; Fischer and McInerney 2012). Consequently, although we have an idea of the factors that make participation

more likely, we know very little about the process by which those factors interact with the experiences of activists to influence their trajectories once mobilized.

A first factor proposed by the literature is biographical availability, that is, the absence of responsibilities that compete with activism for an individual's time and effort (See McAdam 1988; Beyerlein and Hipp 2006). While duties such as family and work can prevent a person from mobilizing, the evidence is mixed. Some scholars find that personal responsibilities make it harder for activists to remain committed (See Goodwin 1997; White 2010; Corrigall-Brown 2011). Others find movements in which members manage to reconcile the demands of activism and other spheres of life (Nepstad 2004).

Second, a large body of research describes how networks are crucial for participation, because they influence people's worldviews and inform about opportunities for mobilization (For a review see Diani 2004). Nevertheless, empirical studies are less clear with regards to the role of networks after recruitment. In some cases, being immersed in militant circles contributes to sustaining mobilization (Passy and Giugni 2000; Corrigall-Brown 2011), but in others, such links can generate conflicts that force individuals out of the movement (Klatch, 2004).

Third, many scholars have analyzed the ways in which varying emotional and moral attachment to a movement can affect the trajectories of participants (see Jasper 2011). However, while these dynamics can sustain a participation even in the worst

circumstances (see Wood 2003; Gould 2009), they can also drive people out of a movement, through burnout, disillusion, or despair (Hirschman 1982; Taylor 2006; Gould 2009).

Finally, a fourth factor refers to the benefits of political participation. From a rational choice perspective (Olson 1965), we would expect people to sustain involvement as long as its outcome justifies the costs incurred. However, this perspective relies on the assumption that collective action is entirely instrumental, something which is hardly ever true (see Jasper 1997, Klandermans 2004). Scholars have found numerous instances of people remaining committed even despite extreme costs or the absence of noticeable effects (See for instance Jasper 1997; Wood 2003; Nepstad 2004).

In sum, we have an understanding of the factors that might contribute to disengagement or commitment, but the evidence is inconclusive. Part of the problem is the scarcity of research on the trajectories of activists following their entry in a movement. As Lynn Owens (2009) and Catherine Corrigall-Brown (2011) argue, a significant portion of social movement theory still sees withdrawal from collective action as the inverse of recruitment. Hence, many of our assumptions about the erosion of individual participation are based on extrapolation on studies that focus on how people join social movements (i.e., if a condition contributes to involvement, then its weakening must lead to disengagement). However, the decline of activism is a far more complex process. In particular, once a person is mobilized the relation between biography and

participation becomes bidirectional. People's lives, networks, attitudes and incentives not only affect contention, but are affected by it as well (See McAdam 1989; Giugni 2004; Corrigall-Brown 2011). Consequently, in order to understand why some people stay while others leave it is important not only to discern which aspects of a person's life matter, but also how those aspects interact with the experience of mobilization.

Conceiving commitment as the result of the interplay between a person's background and his or her experiences in a social movement has three implications. The first one is that sustained activism is more than simply the reflection of personal characteristics. If participation only depended on having "the right stuff" then commitment would emerge inevitably after recruitment. However, research suggests that the development of militancy is a gradual, intricate and contingent process. For instance, Bert Klandermans (1997) has shown how involvement in a social movement is the result of a multi-stage progression in which people sympathetic with a cause become potential recruits, join an organization, and then follow different trajectories within it. Ziad Munson's recent study of anti-abortion protesters in the United States (Munson 2008) demonstrates how dedication to pro-life beliefs rarely precedes participation. Instead, activists had surprisingly diverse views on the issue at the moment of their first demonstration. Their strong adherence to the cause developed later, as a consequence and not a cause of their increasing involvement.

Despite this evidence, most scholars who study the sources of individual participation have focused on comparing activists with some control group, seeking to identify the personal features that are more common among the former (See for instance McAdam 1988; Corrigall-Brown *et al* 2009). While this approach has been very useful, it has also led to a rather static view of participation, which is seen as the direct result of certain attributes rather than as a dynamic process. As Munson shows, such an interpretation lacks explanatory power:

> Logicians call this problem the fallacy of affirming the consequent. We may identify a whole set of characteristics we attribute to [activists], but not all activists will ever share those characteristics. Moreover, many non activists will have these same attributes. The causal connection between individual attributes and activism will therefore always be weak, no matter how many individual characteristics we identify or how many people we include (2008, p. 4)

The second implication deals with the more general issue of the incentives to participate in any social action. In order to understand why some people stay mobilized while others do not, it is crucial to see participation not only as a mean to other ends, but also as an end in itself. That is, the analysis should incorporate the intrinsic rewards of being involved in a social movement organization, and contemplate the possibility that an action can generate its own incentive. For instance, in her study of peasant participation

in the Salvadorian insurgence, Elizabeth Wood (2003) demonstrates that material demands were not the central cause for involvement, because access to newly available lands did not depend on participation. In contrast, those *campesinos* who became part of the revolutionary movement or collaborated with it, risking extreme costs in the process, did so because participation allowed them to express moral outrage, helped them realize a particular view of God's will, and provided them with what Wood calls "pleasure in agency": the deeply enjoyable experience of asserting one's efficacy against a background of subordination. Another example is Harel Shapira's book on the Minutemen in the US-Mexico Border (Shapira 2013). He argues that the reason why these people participate in vigils looking for unauthorized crossers does not lie in any particular view about immigration, but in the very practice of soldiering. Acting like warriors allows them to escape their feelings of alienation from mainstream American society, and obtain a deep sense of meaning for their lives.

The third implication is the complexity of the relation between involvement in a social movement and a person's identity. Becoming a committed activist implies a growing identification with a group of people, a sense of belonging to a collective entity that becomes central for a person's sense of self. (Taylor and Whittier 1992; Poletta and Jasper 2001; Hunt and Benford 2004; Klandermans 2004; Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2010). Moreover, participation in collective action also alters people's identity through the increasing salience of the activist role in their idea of who they are (Corrigall-Brown 2011; Viterna 2013). In some cases, this transformation is strong enough to make

complete disengagement impossible, as illustrated by Doug McAdam's study of volunteers in the Freedom Summer campaign of 1964:

> From the beginning, the volunteers had been told […] that they could always "go home". Unlike the black SNCC staff, the volunteers were supposed to be able to leave Mississippi and return to mainstream white society without much difficulty. This presumed that the volunteers would leave Mississippi the same as they entered. Many did not. They had been changed by the political and personal 'lessons' they had learned in Mississippi. Those lessons had the effect of moving them away from the institutions and identities they had previously organized their lives around, and toward an exciting new world they had only glimpsed during the summer. Their choice was either to rejoin mainstream society, often with considerable difficulty, or act on the lessons of Mississippi. Most of the volunteers chose the latter course (1988, p. 145)

Nevertheless, these transformations in people's identity are not straightforward. Participation in itself does not guarantee that a person will identify with a group of fellows, or see him or herself in a new way. In other words, many obstacles lie in the way between involvement in contention and identity change. Biographical changes may move an individual away from militant circles (Passy and Giugni 2000; White 2010), or the very label of "activist" might be resisted by participants (Bobel 2007). In addition, the issue-scope and structure of social movement organizations have a direct effect on

whether a person identifies with a particular group, a set of values, or with activism in general (Corrigall-Brown 2011). Organizations also seek to affect their member's identity, in some cases with significant success (Nepstad 2004; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2012).

Thus, the relation between activism and identity is never linear, because the strength of a person's attachment to the practice of collective action depends on how such practice relates with other sources of identification and meaning. In particular, it will be difficult for anyone to see activism as an end in itself unless the practices while mobilized contribute to a sense of righteousness. That is, sustained participation depends on the resonance between the routines of mobilization and a valued identity (such as a worker, a patriot, a fighter, or a saint). If the activities associated with being in the movement help a person define him or herself as part of such a category, they will provoke self-pride. However, if these activities conflict with that identity, if they are perceived as something that members of an esteemed group would never do, then they will be seen as shameful. Furthermore, unless such routines are linked in one way or another with a valuable aspect of a person's sense of self, participants will be indifferent to them.

In sum, people's appreciation of a social activity is related to its capacity to uphold a valued identity. Activism thus affects individuals' sense of selves not only by providing new sources of identification and meaning, but also through its connections with other aspects of that person's history (Passy and Giugni 2000). Furthermore, when

the practices of individuals in a movement reinforce their connection with a positive aspect of their identity that is perceived as being under threat, commitment is even more likely to emerge.

Beyond contentious collective action

Dealing with these three implications requires us to broaden our scope beyond social movement theory and draw insight from other areas of social knowledge. That is, we need to engage in what Dianne Vaughan (2004 and 2014) calls "analogical theorizing": the development of concepts by comparing phenomena that apply to diverse cases. Despite the uniqueness of any social phenomenon, the processes that influence the experiences of individual participants are rarely exclusive to it. Thus, literature on a diverse set of cases can inform our knowledge of a particular object of study. For example, Dianne Vaughan's own research on the *Challenger* disaster (Vaughan, 1996) draws heavily on areas that seem to have little to do with that specific case. Her work uses cases such as corporate whistleblowing, prison informants, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of organizational deviance and conformity (Vaughan, 2004:318). Likewise, Javier Auyero and Debora Swistun's work on a contaminated neighborhood in Argentina (2009) apply Vaughan's analysis of risk perception at NASA to explain how local inhabitants gradually normalize living in an environment that seems evidently poisonous to outsiders. In turn, Auyero and Swistun's themselves argue how their research can be used to explain processes that

thwart collective action at the individual level. Such analytical concatenation is possible, as Vaughan argues, because:

> "Regardless of differences in size, complexity, and function, all organizational forms have characteristics in common. They share basic aspects of structure: hierarchy, division of labor, goals, normative standards, patterns of coming and going. Further, they share common processes: socialization, conflict, competition, cooperation, power, culture. This means we can compare them, generating theory based on analogies and differences that we find" (2014: 64)

In other words, attachment to a social movement is the result of mechanisms that are present in all sorts of contexts. People develop commitment to many different activities in ways that are analogous to the process of becoming an activist. Thus, to understand why individuals commit (or not) to a social movement we need first to explore the ways in which a social action becomes an end in itself, and focus on the rewards of participation: what do people obtain from doing something? To use Jack Katz' (1988) terms, it is necessary to analyze not only the "background" of action (the personal characteristics that make an individual more likely to do something) but also the "foreground" (the qualities of the act that make it attractive). In his study of different forms of crime, Katz argues for focusing on the experience of deviance itself, rather than on the characteristics of offenders. Only once we consider the seductive aspects of criminal acts, we can understand why people participate in them. In other words, any

attempt to explain law-breaking based on the background conditions associated with criminality will run into three problems:

> (1) whatever the validity of the hereditary, psychological and social-ecological conditions of crime, many of those in the supposedly causal categories do not commit the crime at issue; (2) many who do commit the crime do not fit the causal categories; and (3) what is most provocative, many who do fit the background categories and later commit the predicted crime go for long stretches without committing the crimes to which theory directs them (p. 3-4).

The fact that involvement in a particular social action does not follow directly from background factors does not mean that these factors are irrelevant. Quite the contrary, the process by which an action becomes self-promoting varies according to the characteristics of each individual. Biographies matter because, as Matthew Desmond demonstrated in his study of forest firefighters (2007), they influence the way in which some people are predisposed to enjoy certain activities or see them as "natural" to them. According to Desmond, the men who risk their lives every summer fighting wild fire do so because the activity allows them to actualize a set of dispositions deeply rooted in their personal histories:

> Crewmembers gravitate "naturally" to the ranks of firefighting not in search of manly honor but because the country-masculine habitus seeks out a universe in

> which it can recognize itself, an environment in which it can thrive. Wildland firefighting offers a specific and salient outlet for the reproduction, reaffirmation, and reconstitution of the country-masculine habitus; it offers a space and culture that corresponds to, confirms, and amplifies crewmembers' skills and dispositions, a habitus rooted in the rural, working-class world where they grew up (p. 266).

Thus, in order to understand how people become "experts" in a particular action, it is necessary to examine the connections between individual biographies and the social setting where action takes place. Only then we will understand how the general dispositions a person carries (the *general habitus*) are actualized into a specific set of abilities and attitudes (the *specific habitus*):

> Examining the emergence of a specific habitus from the configuration of skills and dispositions that constitute the general habitus requires much more than simply researching personal histories […] What makes an habitus-driven approach distinct in its appearance is its insistence on ferreting out specific links connecting personal histories with present-day social contexts […]. It requires rigorously examining the origins of acquired dispositions and skills as well as the precise ways they advantage or disadvantage individuals in various organizational, educational, cultural, social or political settings. (*Ibid*, pp. 268-269)

Moreover, the development of enjoyment with regards to a practice is a social learning process, in which individuals gradually attach new meanings to their routines through interactions with other participants. Such a mechanism is analogous to the one illustrated in Howard Becker's study of marihuana users (Becker, 1963). According to Becker, users rarely find their first experiences with the drug pleasurable. In order to enjoy the practice of smoking marihuana, they need to be taught the proper technique for doing it, how to recognize its effects, and how to see those effects as gratifying:

> "In summary, an individual will be able to use marihuana for pleasure only when he goes through a process of learning to conceive of it as an object which can be used in this way. No one becomes a user without (1) learning to smoke the drug in a way which will produce real effects; (2) learning to recognize the effects and connect them with drug use (learning, in other words, to get high); and (3) learning to enjoy the sensations he perceives. In the course of this process he develops a disposition or motivation to use marihuana which was not and could not have been present when he began use, for it involves and depends on conceptions of the drug which could only grow out of the kind of actual experience detailed above. On completion of this process he is willing and able to use marihuana for pleasure" (Becker, 1928: 76)

This socially constructed sense of enjoyment is rarely a once-for-all acquired disposition. Quite the opposite, it is continuously taught and learned. The sustainment of an activity, in other words, depends on a regular source of validation that takes the form of constantly learning new ways of enjoying it, and teaching others how to do so. An example of this process is found in Claudio Benzecry's study of opera fanatics (Benzecry, 2011), in which he describes how the passion of aficionados involves a conscious and moral effort to deepen their involvement and understanding of the genre. Through mostly informal and bounded interactions with each other, fans validate and reinforce their attachment to the practice of opera going.

In sum, commitment to a social activity is the result of a process by which the interaction between an individual's personal background and the experiences associated with the activity generates a sense of gratification, which in turn leads to dispositions that sustain involvement. Hence, to explain why some people become long-term activists we need to delve into each individual's past and present, uncovering the ways in which different aspects of collective action appeal to them. In the following pages I apply this approach to the experiences of activists in the piquetero movement.

The Piquetero Movement

Starting in the 1980s, Latin America has experienced an unprecedented period of democratic rule. Most countries in the region have developed free and fair elections, high

levels of individual freedoms, and institutional mechanisms for transfer of power that held even in times of civil unrest. However, this period has also coincided with an overall retrenchment of the welfare arm of the state, an expansion in structural unemployment and informality, and a reduction in the power and membership of unions, all related to the extensive neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1970s by both authoritarian and democratic administrations. Most countries suffered significant increases in inequality, marginality and interpersonal violence. Hence, the last decades combine a great expansion of political liberties with both *de facto* and *de jure* abolition of long standing social and economic rights.

This scenario has proven fertile ground for the development of innovative experiences of collective action. Faced with growing opportunities for dissent on the one hand, and the undermining of their means of livelihood on the other, millions of Latin Americans have organized to demand access to a decent standard of living. The result has been a significant growth in social mobilization, which has attracted the attention of many scholars. In particular, researchers have highlighted four aspects of these experiences of contention. The first is their role in the "deepening" of democracy (see Roberts 2008). That is, social mobilization has played a central role in the efforts to expand the social rights recognized and enforced by the state[3] (Almeida 2007; Roberts 2008; Delamata 2009). The second aspect is the increasing influence of social

[3] These scholars have drawn heavily on Karl Polanyi's concept of "double movement." (Polanyi 1944). As Polanyi states, the attempts to impose the fiction of a self-regulated market cause enormous human suffering. The result is a "double movement", the reaction of society to defend itself by establishing barriers to protect individuals from the excesses of capitalism.

movements in institutional spheres of power, especially during the last decade. The recent "turn to the left" in Latin America is in part a reaction to the rise in mobilization that preceded and accompanied it. Many of the current governments in the region are direct expression of political realignments that took place during periods of revolt. In other cases, political elites have sought to incorporate parts of social movements into their coalitions, with varying degrees of success. The result is a complex process that has not been exempt of complications and drawbacks, but that on the whole has expanded the role that social movements play not just in the streets, but also in the political system at large (See Baker and Greene 2011; Prevost, Oliva Campos and Varden 2012; Burbach, Fox and Fuentes 2013). A third aspect emphasized by scholars is the international connections between movements that began at the national level. Since many of these experiences are direct or indirect reactions to the consequences of neoliberal policies, it is not surprising that transnational networks of activists have developed with time. Assisted by events such as the World Social Forum and the struggle against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, activists in the region have had a growing influence in events at a global scale. (See Almeida and Johnson 2006; Stakler-Sholk, Varden and Kuchner 2008; Silva 2013). Finally, observers have highlighted the dilemmas and challenges generated by the immersion of these movements in a political process marked by neoliberal principles of governance (See Harvey 2005, Roberts and Portes 2006, Svampa 2008). In particular, grassroots groups that developed in opposition to pro-market policies face the quandary of offering services to underprivileged communities in ways that undermines their political autonomy and/or reproduce essential components of neoliberalism. The

delegation of the provision of essential public goods from state agencies to civil society institutions raises substantial concerns about the potential role of social movements as enablers of the very social order they want to transform (See Gomez and Massetti 2009, Hale 2011).

The piquetero movement has been one of the prime examples in this recent wave of contention, and as a result it has been the object of significant scholarly attention. However, this literature has left many questions unanswered. Researchers have analyzed the relations of piquetero organizations to previous episodes of protest (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Merklen 2005; Pereyra 2008), their strategy and repertoire (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Massetti 2004), their context and structure of political opportunities (Delamata 2004; Epstein 2006; Massetti 2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008), how they are portrayed in the media and perceived by other groups in society (Svampa 2005 and 2008; Gomez 2009), and their influence in policies (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Gomez 2009). But almost no study has asked the questions: Who are the piqueteros? In which ways are they different or similar from other people in their neighborhoods? The few scholars that have sought to do this usually focus on only one person, organization or district (Auyero 2003; Ferraudi Curto 2009; Frederic 2009; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano 2013). In particular, very few studies have analyzed the divergent trajectories of activists in the movement, and as a result the question of why some people develop commitment while others do not remains poorly understood.

For more than fifteen years, piquetero organizations have been a constant presence in countless poor neighborhoods of Argentina, contributing to the sustenance of families in need, providing health, education and legal services, and generating opportunities for citizen and community empowerment. The movement emerged as a response to the social consequences of the drastic neoliberal reforms implemented in the early 1990s. The direct antecedents of the movement were localized uprisings in different provinces of Argentina (Barbetta and Lapegna 2001; Auyero 2002 and 2003; Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Pereyra 2008; Ramos 2009). In many of these instances, protesters occupied public spaces and buildings, as well as blocked roads, to demand attention to the consequences of layoffs, budget cuts, and lack of payment of salaries. Shortly after, a number of groups in the periphery of the country's largest cities, especially Buenos Aires, began to emulate the protesters in those events, developing a very efficient repertoire of contention[4]. Most organizations structure themselves as networks of local groups, recruiting people from poor neighborhoods and staging disruptive protests such as blockades of roads and pickets in front of factories or supermarkets. In the ensuing negotiation with the authorities, they demand the distribution of social assistance, usually in the form of foodstuffs and positions in workfare programs. If successful, they distribute these resources among participants, following criteria based on need and merit: whoever has more dependents and contributes more time and effort to the organization would be prioritized. Moreover, organizations use part of these resources to develop a

[4] For the concept of repertoire of protest, see Tilly (1995).

vast array of social services in areas where the welfare arm of the state had retreated. The prospect of obtaining resources needed for survival draws many people into these organizations; which in turn helps them continue demonstrating for more "jobs, foodstuffs, and plans".

During its first years the movement grew in strength and mobilization capacity, developing an extended territorial network and becoming a major actor in national politics. This expansion coincided with a marked deterioration of economic conditions in the country. Starting in 1998, the economy entered a four-year-long recessive phase that caused unemployment to rise to record levels[5]. This situation led countless unemployed individuals to join the movement. For them, piquetero organizations provided a space for the expression of demands, a way of accessing basic goods and services, and a place to regain self-confidence and pride in the face of structural joblessness (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Quiros 2006; Epstein 2006). In other words, piquetero groups functioned as problem solving networks (Auyero 2001), that is, channels through which essential resources for survival could be obtained (Quiros 2006; Ferraudi Curto 2009; Frederic 2009). As long-term unemployment became widespread in numerous neighborhoods, the networks on which poor families had traditionally relied for assistance, such as relatives and community institutions, were rapidly exhausted of resources. As a result, piquetero

[5] By May 2002, 34.2% of the labor force was either jobless or underemployed. The situation was particularly tough in the Greater Buenos Aires, where 24.2% of workers were unemployed. In October of that year, 57% of Argentineans were below the official poverty line. Source: National Institute of Statistics and Census.

groups emerged as a central component of the "strategy of survival" of many Argentineans[6].

By 2002, the strength of the movement reached its peak. It had recruited thousands of members and played a key role in the demonstrations of December 2001 (which forced the resignation of the national government). In addition, it had attained a significant degree of cohesion, evidenced by the attempts to create a coalition of all piquetero groups. Moreover, its influence was significant: the leaders of some organizations became interlocutors of the national government, and protests forced the authorities to offer concessions, in particular, a new workfare program covering two million unemployed workers.

However, piquetero organizations ultimately failed to sustain this momentum. Starting in 2003, the movement began to lose its presence in the streets. In spite of having accumulated significant know-how as well as material and symbolic resources, all organizations were confronted with a challenging scenario. In 2003 national elections marked the emergence of a center-left government, which sought alliances with piquetero leaders, increasing the divisions between hard-liners and moderates. Second, media portrayal of the movement turned increasingly negative. Third, the attempts at unity of the 2001-2002 years failed to materialize (See Svampa 2005, 2008 and 2009; Svampa

[6]For the concept of strategy of survival see Lomnitz (1975), Hintze (1989), Gonzalez de la Rocha (1986 and 2006).

and Pereyra 2005; Torres 2006; Massetti 2006; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; also see Battistini 2007; Wolff 2007).

In addition, by late 2002 Argentina's economy entered a phase of labor-intensive growth after four years of recession. As a result, individuals and families that had resorted to the movement to obtain resources regained access to the labor force, despite high levels of informality. Moreover, economic growth improved the condition of the national government's budget, which allowed for an increase in social spending. This new context caused a progressive erosion of membership in the movement. While during the worst years of the crisis piquetero organizations had been key in the survival strategy of countless poor families, after 2002 their relative importance declined, as other ways of making ends meet became available.

However, the fact that the movement is not what it was ten years ago does not mean it has vanished. Piquetero organizations still have a significant mobilization capacity, and most of them are able to mobilize at least hundreds of activists. Furthermore, in some aspects organizations have been strengthened. Piquetero groups today have a greater number of physical resources and know-how, and they are recognized as managers of social policies. Most crucially, over the years these organizations have develop a core structure of dedicated members that keep the movement active, and who can be depended on even in moments of crisis. As a result,

piquetero organizations are still present in poor districts all across the country, where they offer all sorts of services to the community.

Looking ahead

Understanding the sources of long-term political participation has important implications beyond the field of social movement studies. Exploring the ways in which people engage in the practice of activism can illuminate a broader debate on the sources of social action. In the end, my research is an inquiry into why individuals become involved in any particular social activity. One possibility to address this type of question is to compare participants with a control group of nonparticipants, with the purpose of identifying the personal characteristics that make a person more likely to be among the former. An alternative way is to explore the intrinsic rewards of engaging in the practice. My research in the following pages is based on the assumption that both strategies are necessary: the answer to the question of commitment to a social movement lies not in the background of participants, nor on their experiences while mobilized. Instead, it is the interaction between both that is crucial. Analyzing the resonance between a social practice (including but not limited to activism) and other aspects of a person's life is the best way to understand why some people appreciate it while others do not.

The three articles that constitute the core of my dissertation cover different aspects of my research question. The first one explores the reasons why some piquetero

activists develop a strong attachment to their organizations, while others in a similar situation withdraw after a while. I argue that through the interplay between their personal histories and their experiences in the movement, these individuals come to see their participation as an end in itself rather than as a mean to other ends. In particular, their involvement in the movement allows them to solve four deficits in their lives: the lack of groups to belong to, the negation of their agency, their immersion in a chaotic environment, and the lack of appreciation in the community. Obtaining belonging, empowerment, refuge and recognition makes a person far more likely to see participation as valuable, and hence to make efforts to avoid dropping out.

While the first article explains the divergent trajectories of members, the second one explores the mechanisms through which some of them become activists, paying particular attention to the role of routines. I contend that while scholars have thoroughly studied the influence of worldviews in the emergence of commitment, the role of practices while mobilized has received much less attention. In other words, I argue that people become long-term activists not only by "learning to care" about a cause (See Munson 2008), but also by "learning to enjoy" their activities in the movement. In the case of the piqueteros, I describe how the practices of activists allow them to recreate, develop and protect routines associated with a respectable working-class lifestyle that is increasingly uncommon for poor Argentineans.

The third paper connects these arguments with the trajectory of the piquetero movement as a whole. I disagree with the many scholars who argue that piquetero organizations declined significantly after peaking during the 2001-2002 crisis. Instead, I put forward a new interpretation of the movement's post-2003 trajectory, based on three ideas. First, most piquetero organizations have experienced a strengthening of their core structures. Second, this strengthening took place because of the years after the crisis have been much more propitious for the sustainment of grassroots organizations than is usually argued. Finally, it was the movement's resonance with its past, rather than its innovative aspects, what allowed it to grow in its first years, and what influenced its trajectory afterwards. Conceptualizing the piquetero movement as the continuation of previous experiences of collective action by the poor helps explain its trajectory much better.

After the three articles, a conclusion briefly enumerates the main implications of my study for the different literatures I engage. I argue that my contributions lie not only on the field of social movement studies, but also on recent discussions about the role of grassroots movements for Latin American democracies. This conclusion is followed by a methodological appendix that describes the main challenges and decisions that shaped my research, and a second appendix with a list of respondents and some of their characteristics.

Each chapter in this dissertation deals with different aspects of Argentina's history. For the last seventy years, Argentinean society has been defined by the difficulty

to combine political stability with long-term economic growth, and by the presence of a political movement, Peronism, that has remained the preferred political choice of the working classes (See James 1988, Levitsky 2003, Gerchunoff and Llach 2003). The first two administrations of Juan Domingo Peron (1945-1955) instituted generous welfare policies linked to full employment, union membership, and import-substitution industrialization. This social legacy survived the long period of instability and violence that followed Peron's overthrow and exile by the armed forces in 1955. Only after the collapse of the extremely repressive dictatorship of 1976-1983 was the country able to establish a system of free and competitive elections that was able to withstand periods of turmoil and crisis. However, the three decades of democratic rule since 1983 have been besieged by the consequences of extensive neoliberal policies implemented since the 1970s, which led to skyrocketing inequality and poverty, while promoting limited long-term economic growth.

Argentinean society thus continues to struggle with the challenge of combining effective democratic governance with an inclusive and sustainable model of economic development. In this context, piquetero organizations have been for the past two decades one of the most effective ways for underprivileged Argentineans to express their demands and address their most immediate needs. As part of a broader wave of social movements that emerged in the last decades in Latin America, they remain essential to the future of Argentina's young democracy. Nevertheless, it is impossible to understand their history, challenges and potential without listening carefully to the experiences of those who are or

have been part of them. In a fundamental sense, comprehending a social movement always entails an (inherently limited) effort by the researcher to place him or herself in the shoes of activists.

Chapter 2. Iron Fellows: Life Histories and Political Commitment in a Poor People's Movement

Introduction

Social movements are crucial for democracy. All around the world, activists bring new issues to the public agenda, promote social change, and empower marginalized segments of society. However, despite substantial progress in research, many aspects of people's involvement in collective action remain poorly understood. Most scholars agree on the factors that promote engagement in contention. However, the relation between these conditions and actual individual behavior is frequently weak. That is, many people who share the features associated with participation do not get involved in social movements, while others without those attributes become lifelong activists. Thus, it is necessary to complement the literature's emphasis on factors with a discussion of the processes by which those factors affect some people more than others.

This article addresses this issue by exploring the experiences of participants in the Unemployed Worker's Movement (also known as the *piqueteros*) in two Argentinean cities. I focus on an empirical puzzle with important theoretical implications. At the moment of joining, the profile of most recruits hardly matches the one that according to the literature is conducive to sustained activism: Most of them are extremely poor, uneducated, and have a limited sense of collective efficacy. Moreover, the vast majority

enter a piquetero organization not due to ideological affinity, but because it offers a way to obtain means of sustenance. Not surprisingly, many leave when alternative ways of attaining resources become available. However, others stay and become increasingly committed, to the point of making personal sacrifices to remain involved.

Drawing upon in-depth interviews with 153 current and former piquetero activists in two cities, along with participant observation of events in their organizations, this paper seeks to understand the reasons for this puzzle. Why do some people scale up commitment despite countless obstacles? I examine how the background of activists, coupled with their experiences while mobilized, lead some to further deepen their involvement –becoming, in their words, "iron fellows". I argue that through their practices in the movement, some people are able to overcome four crucial deficits in their lives: a scarcity of groups to belong to, the feeling of being unable to affect one's condition, the immersion in a chaotic and frequently violent environment, and the lack of public appreciation. Obtaining belonging, empowerment, refuge and recognition leads some people to see activism as an end in itself, and hence develop a strong attachment to their organizations.

Addressing this empirical puzzle is important not only because it sheds light on one of Latin America's most recent and influential experiences of protest. It also allows us to complement the current literature on social movement participation. Although there is a substantial body of research on the factors that contribute to a person's engagement

in contention, many more studies focus on the recruitment phase than on the long-term trajectories of activists. Consequently, we know a great deal about the conditions that make participation more likely, but we are less knowledgeable about the process by which people develop commitment (or not) to the organizations they have joined. Answering this question requires us to engage in a broader debate concerning the sources of social action. In other words, in order to understand sustained activism we must first explore the ways in which partaking in an activity becomes an end in itself. Since the mechanisms that attach people to contentious politics are also present in other instances of collective life, we can draw clues from areas of sociology, beyond the limits of the field of social movement studies.

Theoretical framework

Social movement theory has traditionally focused more on the emergence of contention than on its sustainment and decline (Owens 2009). Studies at the individual level are no exception: our understanding of activism is much more elaborate with regards to recruitment than later stages of participation (Corrigall-Brown 2011; Fillieule, 2010; Nepstad 2004; White 2010). As a result, even though we have a clear idea of which factors influence civic engagement, the relation between them and actual behavior is relatively weak, especially once people are already mobilized. Many individuals sharing the features associated with long-term participation do not sustain their involvement, while others lacking those attributes become lifelong activists.

The first factor mentioned by the literature is biographical availability, that is, the absence of obligations that conflict with participation (See Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; McAdam 1988). Although this factor explains why some people stay and others leave, evidence is mixed. Some studies find that personal obligations make it harder for activists to remain committed (See Goodwin 1997; White 2010), but others find movements in which members manage to reconcile the demands of activism and other spheres of life (Nepstad 2004). Second, a large body of literature describes how networks are key to participation, because they shape people's worldviews and inform about opportunities for protest (see Diani 2004). Nevertheless, research is more equivocal about what happens after recruitment. Being immersed in militant circles might contribute to sustaining involvement (see Corrigall-Brown 2011; Passy and Giugni 2000), but these links can also pull individuals out of a particular movement (see Fisher and McInerney 2012; Klatch 2004). Third, in recent years scholars have studied the role of emotional and moral factors in collective action (see Jasper 2011). Strong feelings and deeply held beliefs can sustain a person's participation even despite a very negative environment (see Gould 2009; Wood 2003). However, these dynamics can also drive people out of a movement, through burnout, disillusion, or despair (Gould 2009; Hirschman 1982; Taylor 2006). Finally, a fourth factor refers to the balance between the costs and benefits of activism: an individual is more likely to keep participating when the latter exceed the former (See Olson 1965), or when the expectations of success are higher (See Klandermans 1997; McAdam 1982). However, scholars have found numerous instances of people sustaining

commitment despite a lack of tangible results and the existence of extreme costs (See Hirsch 1990; Nepstad 2004; Jasper 1997; Wood 2003).

In sum, the development, sustainment and erosion of activism are the result of complex processes, the outcome of which is not determined from the beginning by any background characteristics of participants (Klandermans 1997; Munson 2008). This is due to the fact that once a person is mobilized the relation between biography and activism becomes bidirectional. In other words, people's lives, networks, beliefs and incentives not only affect contention, but are affected by it as well. Involvement in collective action exposes individuals to new worldviews, connects them to diverse networks, and helps them acquire new skills, all of which can have long-lasting impacts on the life course of activists (See Corrigall-Brown 2011; Fillieule 2010; Giugni 2007) and transform their sense of self (See Calhoun 1994; Jasper 2011; Poletta and Jasper 2001; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Therefore, in order to analyze the trajectories of activists following recruitment, it is important not only to discern which aspects of a person's life matter, but also how those aspects interact with the experience of mobilization to generate enduring dispositions (See Crossley 2003; McAdam 1988).

The connection between a person's background and his or her experiences in a social setting explains attachment to all kinds of social activities, such as boxing (Wacquant 2004), operagoing (Benzecry 2011), vigilantism (Shapira 2013), or gun-carrying (Carlson 2015). This suggests that we can draw insight from other areas of

social research to study activism, by engaging in what Dianne Vaughan (2004) calls "analogical theorizing". That is, in order to understand why activists commit (or not) to a social movement we need to first explore the ways in which a social action becomes an end in itself, and focus on the seductions of participation: what do people obtain from doing something? To use Jack Katz' (1988) terms, it is necessary to analyze not only the "background" of action (the personal characteristics that make an individual more likely to do something) but also the "foreground" (the qualities of the act that make it attractive). Only once we consider the seductive aspects of a certain behavior we can understand why people engage in it.

Nevertheless, the fact that involvement in a particular social action does not follow directly from background factors does not mean that these factors are irrelevant. Quite the contrary, the process by which an action generates its own incentive varies according to the characteristics of each individual. Biographies matter because they influence the way in which some people are predisposed to enjoy certain activities or see them as "natural" to them (Desmond 2007). Thus, in order to understand how people become "experts" in a particular action, it is necessary to examine the connections between individual biographies and the social setting where action takes place.

In sum, explaining commitment to a social movement entails exploring the ways in which the background of certain people, combined with their practices while mobilized, leads them to appreciate participation as an end in itself. We need to delve

into each activist's past and present, uncovering the ways in which different components of contention resonate with other aspects of their lives. In the following pages I apply this framework to the experiences of piquetero activists. My hypothesis is that mobilization allows some of them to escape a context marked by social isolation and subordination. Their practices in the movement provide them with four things that were in short supply in their lives: a place to belong, the capacity to obtain agency, refuge from a chaotic environment, and the recognition of others in the community. Participants who obtain these four elements experience a strong sense of enjoyment, which in turn increases their chances of staying involved.

Data and Methods

The evidence for this paper was collected through ethnographic fieldwork over a period of three and a half years in two Argentinean cities: Buenos Aires and San Salvador de Jujuy. It took place during the summers of 2011, 2012 and 2013, and for a year starting in December of 2013. The results were 1,170 single-spaced pages of notes, as well as recorded interviews with 153 current and former activists from eleven different piquetero organizations.

Fieldnotes and transcripts were analyzed using open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). I first read over them in detail, writing down trends and issues that emerged. I used this list to create a more specific set of codes, which then

served as a guideline to repeat the systematic line-by-line analysis of the data. As a result, I was able to identify both commonalities and variations in the experiences of people in my study.

Fieldwork was divided into two phases. During the summers of 2011 and 2012 I familiarized myself with my object of study and developed contacts with nine different organizations in the Greater Buenos Aires area. I performed 39 individual and 12 group interviews with activists, for a total of 71 respondents. I also participated in different activities their organizations carried out, including meetings, special events, and demonstrations. I used this information to prepare for the following stages of my project. I centered my research questions on the experiences of people in the movement, and developed a specific methodology to address them. As a result, the second phase of my fieldwork included a number of modifications. First, I performed longer interviews with current and former activists, focusing not only on their time in the movement, but also other aspects of their lives. I diversified my sample by recruiting people who joined their organization in different years and by including a new city in the sample (San Salvador de Jujuy[7]), to account for both temporal and regional variations in the experiences of activists. Finally, I extended my participant observation to cover the everyday, routine activities that make up most of the time activists spend in the movement.

[7] San Salvador de Jujuy was chosen because it differs in substantial aspects from Buenos Aires. The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires concentrates one third of the country's population, and includes the seats of both the national government and the two largest subnational units. In contrast, San Salvador de Jujuy is a much smaller city, the capital of a relatively poor province. Despite these differences, both cities have strong piquetero organizations.

Hence, the bulk of my research at this stage consisted of 93 life-history interviews (See Atkinson 2000; Weiss 1994) with current and former members of different piquetero organizations[8]. The goal was to understand the interrelation between biography and activism for the whole life of each respondent. Thus, interviews took an average of two hours and usually required multiple meetings. My purpose was to obtain a detailed description of the personal history of each subject, in his or her own terms. In particular, interviews sought to illuminate three aspects of the respondent's lives: (a) How did his or her background contribute to being recruited to a piquetero organization? (b) How did the experience of mobilization relate to other spheres of his or her life? (c) How did this connection influence their trajectories after recruitment?

In other words, I followed the advice of Jack Katz (2001 and 2002) of asking "How?" instead of "Why?" questions. I used interviews to carefully reconstruct the experiences of respondents before and after joining a piquetero organization, instead of asking interpretative questions. Given that I am Argentinean, activists were less likely to perceive me as a neutral observer, because in Argentina the social category of "piquetero" is strongly contested. Respondents know that most observers have strong opinions about them, and hence may have felt compelled to provide a "proper response" that obscures their experiences, perceptions and ideas. Only at the end of each interview

[8] The total number of respondents was thus 153. I interviewed a total of 70 people during the summers of 2011 and 2012, and a total of 93 people during 2013-2014. The difference (153 total respondents, 163 interviews) is because I re-interviewed ten people I had already interviewed during the first phase of my fieldwork.

did I ask a general question on the respondent's reasons for joining, staying in and (if applicable) leaving the movement.

I recruited my respondents by asking people during participant observation if they wanted to be interviewed. If they said yes, we would set up a time and location to meet. In addition, I used snowball sampling to recruit dropouts and other activists who were not regularly present at the sites where I did research, with the purpose of increasing the diversity of experiences represented in my sample. I took particular care in asking for referrals after every interview and from different people in each organization, to reduce the potential bias caused by respondents referring me to people with similar views as them.

The reason for interviewing participants and dropouts was straightforward: the best way to fully understand the mechanisms that cause a person to commit (or not) to collective action is to talk to those who stayed and those who left, and analyze the ways in which their experiences differ (for a similar methodology see Corrigall-Brown 2011; Klandermans 1997; Passy and Giugni 2000; White 2010). Contacting dropouts was more difficult, but I was able to do fifteen life-history interviews with former members of the movement[9].

[9] In addition, the extended period of fieldwork provided a largely unexpected advantage: nine of the dropouts withdrew from the movement during my research; hence I was able to meet them before and after they left.

As a result of all these actions, my respondents constitute a diverse sample. 58.2% are women, 40.5% men, and 1.3% transgender. Their ages vary from the early 20s to the late 70s. Twenty of them live in San Salvador de Jujuy, and the rest in seven districts of the Greater Buenos Aires and the city of Buenos Aires itself. The majority was born in different provinces of Argentina, while 13 are from neighboring countries. Their overall ideological stances range from conservative nationalism to left-wing anarchism. Their time in the movement also varies significantly. Some of the people I interviewed had only been in their organization a few months, while others had been involved for more than fifteen years.

In addition to providing opportunities for recruiting respondents, participant observation was a source of sociological evidence in its own right. It was the context for valuable informal conversations, and more crucially, it was my way to witness the *practices* of people in the movement. While interviews were a window into the personal history and perceptions of each activist, participant observation gave me an opportunity to learn about what people do every day in the movement, and how those practices connect with other aspects of their lives, past and present. As a result, in the second phase of my fieldwork I centered on what my respondents call "those days when nothing happens". I continued participating in special events and demonstrations, but I made an effort to observe the daily routines of activists, those unremarkable tasks that constitute the majority of their time in the movement: working in welfare programs, doing paperwork, and having endless meetings.

Findings

Since the 1980s, Latin America has experienced an unprecedented period of democratization. A majority of countries in the region managed to consolidate governments elected by citizens and high levels of individual and civic freedoms. However, this period also coincided with an overall retrenchment of the welfare state, an expansion in structural unemployment and informality, and a reduction in the power and membership of unions, all related to the extensive neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1970s by both authoritarian and democratic administrations. Hence, the last decades combine a great expansion of political liberties with both *de facto* and *de jure* abolition of long standing social and economic rights. This scenario has proven fertile ground for the development of new experiences of collective action. Faced with growing opportunities for dissent on the one hand, and the undermining of their means of livelihood on the other, millions of Latin Americans have organized to demand access to a decent standard of living. (see Almeida 2007; Delamata 2009; Roberts 2008; Silva 2009).

Piquetero organizations have been one of the main expressions of this wave. During the late 1990s, groups of activists, many of them with previous experience in other movements, began to organize groups of unemployed workers and their families in the periphery of Argentina's largest cities, demanding access to jobs and relief programs. These groups rapidly developed a flexible organizational structure and a very efficient

repertoire of contention[10] that allowed them to gain followers and influence. Most organizations are networks of diverse local groups that stage roadblocks and pickets to demand the distribution of social assistance, usually in the form of foodstuffs and positions in workfare programs. If successful, they distribute these resources among participants, following criteria based on need and merit: whoever has more dependents and contributes more time and effort to the group is prioritized. Moreover, organizations use part of these resources to develop a vast array of educational, health, and legal services in areas where the welfare arm of the state has retreated. The prospect of obtaining resources needed for survival draws people into these groups, which in turn helps them continue demonstrating for more "jobs, foodstuffs, and plans." As a result, despite ebbs and flows that follow the economic conditions in the country, for almost two decades the movement has remained a central actor in popular politics in Argentina.

Organizations in the movement have been extensively researched (See for instance Delamata 2004; Garay 2007; Massetti 2004; Merklen 2005; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Svampa 2008; Svampa and Pereyra 2003). However, the lives of rank-and-file activists have received much less attention. Although a number of scholars have produced detailed ethnographic studies on the matter, they usually focus on only one event, group or district (see for instance Auyero 2003; Manzano 2013; Quiros 2006 and 2011). My paper complements this incipient literature by centering on the connection

[10] For the concept of repertoire of contention, see Tilly (1995).

between mobilization and other aspects of the lives of activists, across different organizations and districts.

My interviews and fieldnotes suggest that almost all of the respondents joined the movement "due to necessity": they were in desperate need of resources and a friend, relative or neighbor told them about an organization that was "signing up people" to apply for a social program. Once recruited, they started to attend demonstrations and other activities, receiving foodstuffs regularly, until they obtained a position in a state-funded workfare program. Since organizations usually administer these programs directly, most respondents continued participating to avoid having their position terminated.

Consequently, the way in which most activists enter the movement does not seem to predict long-term commitment: People join for material reasons and participate in order to keep a benefit. Moreover, ideological sympathy appears to play a negligible role in their choice of which organization to join. Not surprisingly, many leave when they obtain a job or as soon as participation becomes too demanding. However, other participants begin to increase their commitment, and gradually become what activists call "iron fellows" (*compañeros de fierro*), dedicated members that make efforts and sacrifices to stay involved. What causes some people to be so committed to the cause that they try their very best to stay around, despite significant obstacles?

The puzzle is more intriguing in that different factors account for the persistence of some activists but not others. Former members usually pointed to family or work obligations when asked how they disengaged, raising the possibility that biographical availability is a requisite for sustained activism. However, many activists manage to overcome the obstacles caused by personal responsibilities. Some work long hours to accommodate the demands of different life spheres. Others prioritize activism over family life, refrain from other social activities, and even separate from partners who oppose their involvement in the movement.

Similarly, the embeddedness of activists in diverse networks is a possible explanation for their trajectories. Almost every subject in the fieldwork learned about the movement through an acquaintance. Nevertheless, preexisting ties do not seem to predict commitment. Dedicated activists report that they did not know many people inside their organization prior to joining. In addition, when asked what they like most about participating, many emphasize the friendships they made in the movement. This suggests that the networks that decrease a person's probability of leaving are created (or reinforced) after recruitment. In this case, these ties are not so much an explanatory factor, but instead something that needs to be explained: Why did some people develop them and others not?

Emotions and worldviews are other potential reasons. That is, a possible explanation for the puzzle is that those who stayed were more morally, ideologically, or

emotionally committed to begin with. However, evidence suggests otherwise. Piquetero organizations are very internally diverse in terms of ideology and usually tolerate different views among its members. In fact, for most activists, ideology seems to have played a very minor role in the choice of which organization to join. Moreover, some of the most enthusiastic activists interviewed were initially ashamed of being in a piquetero organization and joined only as a last resort.

Finally, people may have stayed in the movement because they could not find a better alternative to access resources. Certainly, some activists are in this situation, especially those who are elderly or suffer from disabilities. However, there are also respondents who found a job and made significant efforts to stay in their group, or who rejected lucrative offers from other organizations to switch allegiance. Moreover, many activists remain involved even after obtaining retiree and disability benefits, which do not depend from their organizations.

In sum, an explanation of commitment among piquetero activists based on specific factors serves to understand the experiences of some people but not others. Hence, the answer to the puzzle appears to be in the interplay between personal characteristics and the experience of mobilization. For some activists, this interaction gradually led them to see mobilization as an enjoyable activity, an end in itself rather than just a means to access resources. This increasing gratification helped them overcome obstacles to participation and stay involved for longer.

In other words, for some people participation increasingly became a more complex equation than balancing material costs and benefits. While organizations continued to provide the basic resources needed for the survival of activists and their families, through their practices in the movement some of them began to obtain much more than foodstuffs and workfare plans. These intangible rewards allowed some participants to escape a context marked by alienation and powerlessness, and generated a deep sense of enjoyment. For example, take the case of Jonathan. Like many others he joined reluctantly, after losing his job. He held very negative views of the piqueteros, in part because he had suffered the inconveniences caused by their demonstrations. However, with time this attitude changed, to the point that he rejected offers to work at other locations, even though he could probably make more money than the meager pay of workfare programs:

> *I started in the neighborhood, and at the beginning I went like without enthusiasm, I mean, because before that I used to work in many places, and I always saw roadblocks and I always got to work late and I used to say "These damn* negros[11]*, they are blocking the road". Because I did not know their reasons. Until I started to integrate into the movement, and then I saw that it was a struggle, the necessity of people, why they did all that. And well, that's when I*

[11] In the Argentinean context, "negro" (black) is a term that usually refers in a derogatory way to the urban working class. For more on the origins of this term, see James (1988).

stayed. I have had job offers, but I have stayed here directly, because I kind of like it already (Interviewed 06/01/2012)

In contrast, other activists failed to develop this sense of enjoyment. For them, mobilization was never more than a way to obtain resources. In other words, involvement in a piquetero organization did not become an end in itself. Hence, when more effective ways of obtaining resources became available, these people left, just like most people quit a job when they find another one with higher pay or better conditions. For example, when I asked Oscar, who participated in the movement for a few years, how he disengaged, he said it was part of a strategy to achieve financial stability. For him, leaving his organization was simply trading an unstable job for a better one: running a store that sells food for animals.

The cooperatives [a workfare program] are not a law, so today they exist, but tomorrow maybe not. And I don't want to go back, go through what I already went through, my economic problems. Then I thought about my future, and I said "Ok, I will buy the materials to build my own store". So when I saw that I had more or less what I wanted to have, I went to the organization and thanked them for all their help and all the support they gave me, and told them that I was leaving the cooperative (Interviewed 06/13/2013)

Oscar has nothing against the organization he belonged to. Quite the opposite, he is very thankful, because it gave him a hand when he really needed it. But for him, participation was never more than that: a help that allowed him to survive through hard times.

What, then, leads a person to "like" being in a piquetero organization? Or more generally, under which circumstances does participation become an end in itself? I argue that everyday practices in the movement allow some activists to solve four deficits in their lives. Like many people in their neighborhoods, they are (a) deprived of social links and institutions to belong to; (b) locked in an environment that denies them agency; (c) embedded in a chaotic and frequently violent context; and (d) placed in roles with little public appreciation. Attaining belonging, empowerment, refuge and recognition makes an activist far more likely to make efforts to stay involved.

Belonging

Everyone calls them "the team" (*el equipo*). They are a dozen people, mostly middle aged women, in charge of the paperwork for thousands of workfare plans administered by their organization. They make sure that beneficiaries do their share of work, meet with government bureaucrats regularly, and deal with the countless problems that emerge. In addition, they participate in internal meetings and help organize demonstrations. They have an office at the organization's main building, located in a very

poor neighborhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Most of them are beneficiaries of social plans, but they stay many more hours than required, from early morning to late afternoon. Although sometimes the place is quiet, most days people are coming and going, checking papers and filling out forms all the time. There are also heated discussions, as the sheer amount of work, the difficulty in coordinating tasks among a diverse group of people, and the convoluted characteristics of social policies in Argentina lead to mistakes and complications that put strain on the group. The members of the team know that if they fail some fellows might lose their only income.

All the hectic activity stops around noon, when a group of approximately twenty activists cook and eat lunch together. People relax and start joking: "Did you bring a fishing rod?" "What for?" "To see if I can catch a piece of meat: This stew is pure potato and pasta!" Spicy remarks serve to defuse tension: "See what's the problem here? People are in a bad mood. They must be having bad sex." Someone jokes that "we should keep meeting until Gabriela finally finds a husband!" I get up to do the dishes, and people laugh. "Everyone here is fucking lazy! They've got the guest doing what they should do!"

Most members of the team had never participated in politics before entering the organization. Among them is Valentina, who joined fourteen years ago, during the worst time of the economic crisis of 2001-2002. After she was laid off, she knew that being almost fifty years of age, having no high school diploma, and in the context of record-

high unemployment levels, she would have a very hard time finding a new job. Her sister in law invited her to join the organization, and she reluctantly accepted. She did not enjoy the first meetings she went to: "I got bored, I swear to you, I got bored." However, with time she saw that the group supported its members, and she began to like it. A year later the person in charge of representing her neighborhood within the organization was expelled amid accusations of corruption, and Valentina was chosen to take her place. Ever since then, she has never stopped taking on responsibilities. She starts her days working with other members of the team at the organization's main office. Around five in the afternoon, she goes to another building, where she spends time with fellows from her neighborhood. She returns to her house late in the evenings.

Valentina seems to enjoy spending as much time as possible in the organization despite the demanding workload. She has a pension as a retiree, and since people in this situation cannot be enrolled in workfare programs, she uses a friend's papers to earn a small social plan (in exchange, her friend receives part of the money). Leaving the organization would not cause her a significant loss of income, but not even her frequent arguments with other people, which increase her blood pressure to dangerous levels, discourage her from participating. For her, being very busy, having to deal with all kind of situations, is not a nuisance, but an opportunity to belong to a place. This is particularly important because she hasn't been able to fully separate from her ex-husband, who continues to live in the same house as her. The organization provides her a way to detach, both physically and emotionally, from a life she wants to leave in the past:

> *To me, it is a therapy and to me this is a family. I was always a very bitter person, because we always had a bad relationship, always, I told [my ex-husband] that when the kids were adults I was going to separate from him. It was a very monotonous life, working inside, always. And I said in a meeting the other day that here I learned to laugh, here I began to laugh again. I used to not laugh anymore, because I had so much bitterness in me. And you here are busy with other things, you feel useful, sometimes they value you, sometimes they don't, but it doesn't matter, you are not here to be valued, you are here to do things, because you see that you do things for other people, and that does good to you* (Interviewed 02/14/2014)

Valentina is one of many people in the piquetero movement for whom participation provides friendship networks. The expansion of unemployment in Argentina severely undermined public life in working-class neighborhoods. Community institutions were depleted of resources, state services were cut, and interpersonal violence skyrocketed. Almost every interview included mentions of this deterioration: people no longer feel safe outside of their houses, have less trust in their neighbors, and perceive public figures as corrupt. The majority of my respondents do not participate in any community institution outside of the movement, and non-religious institutions (sports

clubs, teacher-parents groups, neighborhood associations) are almost absent from their lives[12].

As a result, for many people piquetero organizations constitute one of the few places where they can feel respected and supported. In other words, the movement gives them a place to belong. For them, working in poorly paid social programs, eating at soup kitchens every day, and blocking roads under the sun or the rain are not merely burdens. Instead, they are also opportunities to be part of a group of fellows, or as many say, "a family." Bautista described spending a winter night in a roadblock with a smile: "we drink mate, eat a good stew, talk," "and that way time flies, suddenly you realize it's six in the morning already." For people like him, activism acquires a whole new meaning, as it is one of the remaining ways in which they can engage in community life.

Empowerment

When the North Wind hits San Salvador de Jujuy, it gets unbearably hot. It is 10 AM, and I join Camila and Aldana in their health visits to several families in a housing complex built by their organization. They are both in their 20s, and they work at the neighborhood's health post. Their task today is to check several households to make sure children have their vaccines up to date. The whole thing takes several hours, but in the

[12] Of the 93 life-history interviews I made, only 27 include mentions of participation in any community institution other than the movement (even though I asked explicitly about it). Of those 27, 14 participate in a church, with varying degrees of involvement.

end Claudia and Aldana are satisfied: they have immunized more than a dozen children, some of whom had never received vaccines before. As we go back to the health post, Aldana tells us to go ahead, as she will go check on an elderly woman who has been sick lately. She arrives at the post thirty minutes later, her face red due to the intense heat.

Besides a few doctors and biochemists, the majority of people who work at the health post have been trained in a technical school run by the same organization. Gimena coordinates a group of ten people who carry out campaigns of preventive medicine. She is a short woman in her thirties, with a lot of enthusiasm, a skill for easy jokes, and a tendency to speak in diminutives. Of all the people in her group, only one has a formal nursing degree. However, their technical degrees allow them to carry out all sorts of interventions, which Gimena happily describes. For her, the problem with the public health system is not only its severe lack of funds, but the fact that it waits for patients to arrive, instead of taking basic services to people's houses and workplaces. Once in a while, she and her team take a megaphone and walk around the neighborhood informing everyone of different campaigns: "Mommies, there is a vaccination drive at the school this week, don't forget to take the kiddies for their vaccines" "Neighbor, the municipality is giving rabies shots this Saturday, bring your doggies."

Abril is one of the health workers coordinated by Gimena. After graduating from high school in 1989 she had the opportunity to study in one of Argentina's most important universities. Despite her parents' humble condition, for a few years they

sustained her while she lived in another city. However, the challenges of higher education, then marriage and work obligations, and finally the birth of children all conspired to prevent her from graduating. For many years, the feeling of having let down her parents, plus the regrets of missing her opportunity to have a career, made her deeply unhappy. To make things worse, as economic conditions in the country deteriorated, in the late 1990s she and her family were forced to return to Jujuy and take any job they could to survive. The relationship with her husband became strained by his alcoholism. The girl who had planned to become a kinesiologist was now living in a shantytown, cleaning other people's houses, and smuggling clothes from Bolivia to sell in the streets.

In 2009, a neighbor told Abril that a piquetero organization was about to open its own technical college (*terciario*), and that one of the degrees offered was health promoter (*agente sanitario*). With a mix of curiosity and hesitancy, she went to the organization's offices, and learned that the deadline for admissions was in two days. As an impulsive act, she signed up. For Abril, the course turned out to be a life-changing event. She began to share time with classmates and professors, and became reacquainted with her old goals as a student. She had no experience in activism, but when she was invited to participate in demonstrations she joined, at first warily but later with enthusiasm. A few years later, as she was taking her last exams, Abril was offered to work for the organization under Gimena's coordination, as part of a new health post. The pay was not much, but she still accepted. The movement had given her a second chance to have a career, and she took it.

With tears in her eyes, she recalled the day she finally obtained a higher education degree:

> *The first thing I did was to go to church to thank God. And from there I went to the store where my daughter was working. And I told her that I had graduated, and she was happy for me, we cried together. From there I took a cab and I went to my dad's house to tell him* [broken voice]*... that he please forgive me that I had made him wait so many years… that I owed him that.* (Interviewed 10/20/2014)

Involvement in the piquetero movement provides people like Abril with an experience of empowerment. Many activists report that after joining they began to do things they never thought they could do. The movement offers opportunities not just to pursue personal goals that had been abandoned. It also allows members to break free, at least temporarily, from social roles that were perceived as imposed by circumstances outside of their control. Seen in that light, even apparently simple activities are experienced as liberating. Facing the police on equal ground is normal for most middle-class people, but for men who have learned to fear law enforcement, it is a thrilling experience. Being part of a grassroots campaign for a few hours a day might seem unimportant to an outsider, but for many women it offers an opportunity to carve out spaces of personal autonomy. For example, Juliana recalled her work as a low-ranking volunteer in the national elections as follows:

I had never dreamt of being in the day of the election, they put me as a general overseer, and the first time that happened I did not show up, because I was scared, I did not know how I would write down things. And when it was the second time, they put me as an overseer in a voting place. And I did great! And the group that was around me helped a lot! And it was, like the easiest thing! And I had thought it would be like a tragedy! Everyone called me, my kids told me "mommy, I can't believe you're there!" I remember I signed 291 envelopes [Ballots]. *And the ballot box and everything, and that was very important for me, because it's like everyone else thought that I would not do more than being a housewife and raise my kids. Maybe it is not that important for the rest, but for me it is. It is like I grew as a human being.* (Interviewed 05/18/2012)

In sum, practices that allow a person to feel in control over his or her life, even if they seem minor to outsiders, are likely to cement commitment to the organization that makes them possible. Consequently, for many participants empowerment is a key motivation for staying involved in the piquetero movement.

Refuge

On a sunny winter afternoon, Fernando and Mateo are preparing flag poles for an upcoming demonstration. I offer to help, but cutting bamboo sticks with a machete turns out to be harder than expected. Fernando and Mateo laugh at my clumsiness, and

eventually relieve me. As they continue working, Mateo insists that we keep the discarded pieces: he wants to take them to his house and make kites for the kids in his neighborhood.

Mateo is a man in his fifties with an intimidating presence and the kind of life history that reinforces such an image. For years he was associated with violent soccer gangs, and many of his former acquaintances ended up in prison. He also used to work for local politicians: before important rallies he received money to organize cookouts and distribute wine to entice people to attend. He says it was not a good environment: there was too much drugs and alcohol. However, he did not have the opportunity to leave it until after he joined a piquetero organization in 2001. He did not like the idea of being associated with the movement, but was attracted by the prospect of obtaining a pension for his elderly mother. His original plan was to leave when he achieved this goal, but when that happened he instead chose to stay and obtain a workfare plan for himself, mostly because the group helped him change some of his behaviors:

> *When I entered the organization I lived intoxicated, I even got to the point of using drugs. And inside the organization they gave me tasks and responsibilities and with all that I started to forget all the barbarities I did, then here the fellows supported me, and they made me see that what I was doing was wrong. I don't claim to read the Bible and all that, but I did change a lot my way of life, because of the support I have* (Interviewed 06/27/2014)

Mateo's tattoos are a sign of his violent past, as is his ability to organize security at demonstrations. However, his everyday interactions with other activists indicate a completely different present. He frequently jokes, volunteers to do extra work, and has an easy going attitude that belies some of the stories he shares. Seeing a former thug talk about love feels strange, but that is precisely what Mateo highlights about his participation: the tender care he feels from others in the group. In particular, he credits his partner, who he met through the group, with preventing him from relapsing into old habits and bad companies: "Sometimes I get a bit crazy and I say 'I'm going with the guys, to have some beers', and she stops me, 'don't be an idiot, why would you do that?'" In other words, for Mateo activism constitutes a safe haven that isolates him from an enticing but self-destructive lifestyle. From the moment he joined the organization he was surrounded by people who did not share his old habits, and his time was filled with new routines that kept him busy. This estranged him from circles that sustained his addictions, and allowed him to lead a less violent life.

Many of my respondents share a similar story: their organizations give them an opportunity to spend several hours a day in a secure space, largely free of the chaos and violence that surrounds their daily lives. For some people this is experienced as a temporary respite: "it is like doing therapy", "my ground cable", "you clear your head", "people listen to your problems". Other activists are able to turn this temporary refuge into a more permanent situation, that is, organizations provide the networks and resources

necessary to obtain more stability and safety. For instance, Giugliana was able to cut her financial dependence on an abusive partner, and demand child support from him:

> *My ex-husband told me as he was leaving: "You will come to me crying for money". And to this day he is still waiting. I did the legal paperwork, yes. But I won't denigrate my children by crying, telling him "come back, your kids miss you"* (Interviewed 02/26/2014)

In sum, for many people activism provides a way of leaving a context marred by aggression and fear. In some cases this refuge is temporary, while in others participation leads to a more stable and secure life. Practices within the movement thus become increasingly valuable, as they provide an excuse to spend time in a safe environment.

Recognition

Constanza asks me to keep quiet and follow her to another room. As she opens the door, she warns me "don't tell anyone, I just received it". Inside the room a marvel awaits: all sorts of brand-new kitchen equipment. Pans, pots, stirrers, even cookie cutters! There is also a scale, a small mixer for dough, and an electric oven. Constanza has an ear to ear smile as she explains that an agency of the national government sent her all the materials, "because my cooking class is the best in the district." She adds: "there is another class downtown, but it's not as good as mine."

Constanza is 57 years old, and has lived most of her life in one of the toughest neighborhoods in the greater Buenos Aires. She joined her organization in the late 1990s, as everyone around her began losing their jobs. Constanza's situation was particularly dire because of a heart condition that prevented her from doing physically intensive chores. She did not know much about politics. But through gossip in the neighborhood she heard that at the organization's building "you could get plans," so she signed up. She has not left the group ever since.

These days the organization is very different than what it used to be. After years of being "the baddest guys around here," as the leader of the group once told me, starting a few years ago the group developed a more congenial relation with the government, and concentrated on providing education services to the community. They are still heavily involved in electoral politics and participate in demonstrations occasionally. However, the main resources the organization distributes are no longer workfare plans and foodstuffs, but vocational courses and remedial high-school classes for more than a thousand students a year. The organization's building remains the same: a series of rooms around a central yard, constructed over the years in a lot occupied two decades ago. But the rooms that were used as workshops and depots are now classrooms. And the nicest of all, the only one with tiles on the walls, is Constanza's territory: the kitchen, where for many years she has taught her class.

In three and a half years of talking to Constanza, not a single day passed without her bragging about her achievements: the course she teaches is the one that fills fastest, the waitlist has more than ten people, students see her in the streets and call her professor. She also emphasizes to anyone who wants to listen that she has been in the place for many years, and that she never left despite splits with other groups and generous offers to go somewhere else. She describes in detail the many protests she went to, including some that involved walking for hours under the sun or camping for days in the winter. People in the area perceive her as a source of information and help. Dozens of times I saw her answering people's questions about vocational classes and other resources. As she frequently repeats, "in this neighborhood, even the dogs know who I am".

Cases like Constanza's suggest that a fourth aspect of "liking" the piquetero experience is the recognition granted to some people in the movement. In a context where most families have difficulty supporting themselves, being perceived as a person who struggles for the community is incredibly valuable. Participation in a piquetero organization implies a lot of time and effort. In addition to the usual requirements associated with workfare programs, members have to attend meetings, special events, and demonstrations. Hence, if a person's sacrifice is recognized, it can be worn as a badge of pride, it can be used to show others (inside and outside the movement) one's strength, capacity and selflessness.

For many, this recognition is expressed as the deeply satisfying experience of feeling useful. The vast majority of recruits to the piquetero movement are middle-aged men and women whose careers in blue-collar jobs were cut short by deindustrialization, as well as young people with very limited professional prospects. Faced with the alternative of unreliable, menial jobs with little public appreciation, activism provides some members with a much deeper sense of purpose. Feeling that you are recognized as someone with the capacity to impact other people's lives is an effective way of defending a battered sense of self-worth and importance. Fernando, a former autoworker, explained in those terms his reasons for staying in the organization despite all the troubles and conflicts:

> *I stayed in the organization because it is a place where, after all, I felt comfortable. That is also why I took on the commitment to go forward, to participate, to talk with the folks, make them understand. That makes you feel that you are necessary too in the organization, because it is a small contribution, you see, but if we all contributed a bit, things would be different* (Interviewed 05/05/2014)

Hence, recognition is an essential component of participation for many members of the piquetero movement. The perception that insiders and outsiders see you as "someone who gives a hand" provides a valuable sense of purpose to people in a collective organization, which in turn helps sustain their commitment.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article I have explored the reasons why participants in a poor people's movement in Argentina overcome significant barriers and become committed activists. I argue that the answer to this question lies in the interrelation between the biographies of activists and their experiences in the movement, that leads some to see participation as intrinsically valuable. In particular, their practices in the movement provide four things that were lacking in their lives: belonging, empowerment, refuge and recognition.

The experiences of people in the piquetero movement reflect a particular socio-historical context. The importance of activism as a solution to social isolation, powerlessness and insecurity is made possible by the profound transformations caused by neoliberal reforms, which disrupted traditional forms of economic, political and community life among working class Argentineans. In addition, the persistence of piquetero organizations cannot be understood without paying attention to the regional environment in which they are immersed. During the last few decades, Latin American countries have witnessed countless instances of mobilization, which express the demands of marginalized populations, provide social services that the state has ceased to offer, and create opportunities for new forms of democratic governance.

Nevertheless, the mechanisms that sustain participation in the piquetero movement are also present in other experiences of collective action. Belonging to a close-knit group of activists can support involvement in even the most negative environments, as revealed by Deborah Gould's (2008) analysis of ACT UP. In her study of peasant participation in the Salvadorian insurgence, Elisabeth Wood (2003) demonstrates the importance of empowerment for activism, especially against a background of long-term subordination. Obtaining refuge from an unpredictable and violent environment is one of the many reasons why people join social movements, as Jocelyn Viterna (2013) demonstrates in her research on women guerrillas. Finally, in his analysis of the social psychology of protest, Bert Klandermans (1997) highlights the importance of recognition for participation in collective action.

Moreover, these mechanisms are not even exclusive to social movement participation. For example, Allison Pugh's (2009) study on childhood consumer culture highlights that in addition to corporate marketing, the desire to belong is a central motivation behind the choices of both children and parents. Jennifer Carlson's (2015) book on gun-carrying men in Michigan argues that the reason her respondents choose to be armed goes beyond the fear of crime. Instead, carrying a weapon provides a reassuring sense of empowerment and control in a context of social and personal decline. Refuge is a central component of Loïc Wacquant's (2004) study of boxers in Chicago's South Side, where he demonstrates that a key aspect of the activity is the contrast between the gym's orderly routines and the decay that afflicts the surrounding community. Finally, both

Philippe Bourgois' (1996) book on drug dealers in New York and Pierrete Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2001) study of domestic workers in Los Angeles highlight that the search for recognition is crucial to the lives of individuals in very different social contexts.

In sum, focusing on how people develop an appreciation of the intrinsic rewards of participation can help us explain why the factors associated with activism matter for some individuals but not others. However, given that members themselves rarely see participation in a social movement as separate from other aspects of their lives (See Litcherman 1996; Litcherman and Eliasoph 2015; Mische 2008), we should focus on a broader question: Under which circumstances does participation in a social activity become self-promoting? Drawing connections with other areas of sociology is essential to the field of social movement studies, as it will help us question our assumptions, incorporate new cases and questions, and avoid the reification of concepts. As Doug McAdam and Hilary Boudet's (2012) say, it is imperative to "put social movements in their place".

The piquetero movement constitutes one of the most multifaceted experiences of recent collective action in Latin America. As a result, this paper barely captures the great diversity of experiences within it. Future researchers should thus look for further variations in the processes described above. What is the specific influence of gender, class and race relations in them? Are belonging, empowerment, refuge and recognition experienced differently by young and old, nationals and foreigners, able-bodied and

disabled? In addition, scholars should also study the connection between the experiences of rank-and-file piquetero activists and the larger trajectory of their organizations, and use this insight to interpret the ebbs and flows that have marked the movement since its emergence. Have the piqueteros consolidated or declined? Are they the last reverberations of a wave of contention that is over, or have they become an enduring component of Argentinean democracy?

Finally, understanding activism is a crucial development goal. Strong community organizations create channels for the expression of demands to the authorities, support public life, and encourage civic participation among the most vulnerable segments of society. The result is a stronger democracy and a more responsive government. The study of what keeps people involved in collective action provides not only an opportunity to engage broader debates in social science. It also holds the potential to have a real impact on the world, the same goal shared by the men and women in the piquetero movement.

Chapter 3 - Becoming a Piquetero: Past, Novel and Current Routines in the Development of Activist Dispositions

Introduction

Social movements are an essential component of democracy. All around the world, the efforts of activists bring new issues to the public agenda, catalyze social change, and express the demands of disempowered segments of society. However, despite significant progress in research on collective action, many aspects of the process by which people become involved in it remain poorly understood. For the most part, scholars agree on the factors that promote individual engagement in contention. However, the relation between these conditions and actual behavior is frequently weak. That is, many people who share the features associated with participation do not get involved in social movements, while others without those attributes become lifelong activists. Thus, it is necessary to complement the literature's emphasis on factors with a discussion of the processes by which those factors operate at the individual level, in order to comprehend why some people are affected by them, while others are not.

This article addresses this question by exploring the experiences of participants in the Unemployed Worker's Movement (also known as the *piqueteros*) in two Argentinean cities. Based on 153 in-depth interviews with current and former activists, as well as participant observation of their everyday activities in their organizations, I seek to

explore the ways in which members of a poor people's movement develop commitment to activism. The profile of most new members does not seem conducive to long-term involvement: almost all of them are destitute, have low levels of education, and lack any significant sense of collective efficacy. Moreover, the vast majority join not due to sympathy with the movement, but rather as way of obtaining material resources. Despite these conditions, some of them overcome substantial obstacles and become increasingly attached to their organizations, to the point of making personal sacrifices to remain involved. I study the role played by the routines associated with activism in this outcome. In particular, I argue that some participants use their engagement in the movement as a way to actualize dispositions developed in vanishing fields of life. Being a piquetero provides an opportunity for engaging in practices associated with a respectable working-class lifestyle that is increasingly uncommon for poor Argentineans. This opportunity makes participation deeply fulfilling, because it grants workers condemned to chronic unemployment a sense of control over their lives and a way of feeling useful and appreciated. More importantly, activism allows the embodiment of a moral self in the context of pronounced social and economic decay. Within piquetero organizations, older members learn to reconstruct the practices that they associate with an idealized golden past, either as a breadwinner in the factory line or a housewife at home. Younger members learn to develop habits that they were socialized by their parents to see as respectable, but that they never experienced because they came of age in a society with limited opportunities for social mobility through labor. And all members are able to protect wholesome routines related to a proletarian community life that is increasingly

infrequent due to the expansion of interpersonal violence and the collapse of neighborhood institutions.

Moreover, this work of reconstruction, development and protection is strongly gendered, as the value assigned to different routines depends on what is perceived by activists to be proper for men and women. Although they have a strong record promoting women's and LGBT rights in Argentina's poorest communities, the organizations in my study reproduce ideals of masculinity and femininity that are deeply ingrained in the ideal proletarian family life that they seek to save from extinction. In the movement, despite a relative blurring of gender roles imposed by material scarcity, men and women are not assigned to the same activities, nor do they embody the same idea of a moral proletarian self.

By focusing on the role of routines, this study complements the literature on social movement participation. Our models of activism are much more elaborate with regards to the role of ideological conversion than on the influence of practices. In other words, we know much more about how concurring with a set of ideas sustains long-term participation, than about how engaging in certain habits lead to the same outcome. While not denying the importance of worldviews, I argue that routines and lifestyles can be just as important to explain the emergence of sustained activism. We need to center not only on what people <u>think</u>, but also what they <u>do</u> while mobilized, and explore how their practices in the movement relate to other aspects of their lives. I address these questions

by drawing on insights from scholars inside and outside of the field of social movement studies, as the mechanisms that attach people to political participation are also present in other forms of social action. In addition, this paper has important practical implications. Understanding the sources of activism can improve the design of policies aimed at strengthening grassroots development, especially among marginalized populations. If the key to civic engagement lies in the gratification provided by mobilization, identifying the mechanisms through which people learn to appreciate it may generate useful tools for public interventions that sustain community life, in different contexts and regions of the world.

Theoretical framework

For the last fifty years, the field of social movement studies has expanded substantially. Researchers have moved away from a perspective that saw mobilization a deviation from the normal functioning of society (see for instance Blumer 1939; Kornhauser 1959; Smelser 1961), and increasingly recognized the positive contributions of contention. Successive generations of scholars have incorporated new perspectives, cases of study and literatures into their work, resulting in the development of a multidimensional approach that captures many of the complexities of collective action. To a great extent, this development reflects the particular ways in which American and Western European scholars reacted to the 1960s protest wave (Cohen 1985; Klandermans and Tarrow 1988). Researchers in Europe saw these innovative experiences of contention

as expressing novel forms of social identity, and developed what came to be known as the New Social Movements paradigm (See for instance Touraine 1985; Melucci 1996). American scholars in contrast centered their attention on the mobilization process itself, focusing on how social movement organizations advance their causes, make strategic decisions and react to their environment. This emphasis on the how of social mobilization (rather than on the why) was eventually formalized in the political progress paradigm (See for instance Tarrow 1994; McAdam, *McCarthy* and Zald 1996; McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow 2001; Tilly 2004). Together, both paradigms provided a nuanced understanding of the relation between social movement organizations and the larger context in which they take place.

However, the last few decades have witnessed an increasing concern over the limitations of social movement theory. Some of the criticism has centered on its tendency to "normalize" contentious collective action, and its underestimation of the frequency and productivity of disruptive aspects of protest (Piven and Cloward 1992). Other scholars have questioned the excessive attention to factors and structures affecting the mobilization process, and the consequent neglect of the role of agency, culture, and the political orientation of activists (Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Walder 2009). Researchers have also cautioned against the field's bias towards successful instances of mobilization, which leads to the exaggeration of the amount of contention that actually takes places in society (Auyero and Swistun 2009; McAdam and Boudet 2012; Blee 2012; Neumann forthcoming). Finally, some critics have argued that the literature tends to reify the

concept of social movement, downplaying its connections with other forms of political participation (Mische 2008; McAdam and Boudet 2012).

Concern over the limitations of social movement theory has been particularly strong in studies at the individual level. Several authors have questioned previous conceptions of activism as overly rationalistic and negligent of the role of affectual and emotional dynamics (See Goodwin 1997; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Gould 2009). Much of the criticism has also centered on the field's lack of attention to the diversity of experiences, perspectives and trajectories of activists within movements (See Wofford 2010; Corrigal-Brown 2011; Saunders et al. 2012; Viterna 2013). Researchers have also cautioned against the literature's excessive focus on the recruitment phase and the consequent misinterpretation of the processes leading to the sustainment or decline of political participation (See Downton and Wehr 1997; Passy and Giugni 2000; Nepstad 2004; Fillieule 2010; Corrigal-Brown 2011). However, although these studies have led to a significant progress in the literature, many aspects of the process by which people develop attachment to a movement remain understudied. In particular, despite the existence of a prolific debate on the relation between ideas and political participation (Luker 1985; Andrews 1991; Klandermans 1997; Jasper 1997; Munson 2008), the role of practices has received significantly less attention. This limitation is problematic, as overlooking the fact that people might develop commitment to an organization's practices in addition to its ideology entails ignoring two important bodies of research. First, both psychologists and sociologists have long suggested that the connection

between attitudes and action is not necessarily straightforward (See Gross and Niman 1975; Schusman and Johnson 1976). In other words, people's behavior does not always match their beliefs (and even less so, their *stated* beliefs, see Jerolmack and Khan 2014). Second, social movement literature contains plenty of cases in which collective action becomes its own incentive. That is, in many instances the experience of engaging in mobilization is a key motivator besides any moral, material or ideological imperatives external to the action itself (See for instance McAdam 1988; Wood 2003, Barberena, Gimenez and Young 2014).

Therefore, while worldviews are certainly important variables, a complete exploration of the reasons why people commit to participation needs to consider the individual gratifications offered by collective action. That is, how does a person come to enjoy the practices associated with becoming an activist? Addressing this question requires us to broaden our scope beyond social movement theory, and draw insights from other areas of social knowledge. We need to engage in what Dianne Vaughan (2004) calls "analogical theorizing": the development of concepts by comparing phenomena that apply to diverse cases. That is, in order to better understand why activists commit (or not) to a social movement we must first explore the general mechanisms through which people come to see social practices as enjoyable and meaningful.

Understanding how people develop attachment to a certain habit entails unraveling the ways in which the practices associated with it interact with other aspects

of a person's life to develop enduring dispositions (Bourdieu 1977). In other words, routines are not appealing by themselves: the process by which an action generates its own incentive varies according to the characteristics of each individual. Biographies thus matter to the development of commitment because they influence the way in which some people are predisposed to enjoy certain activities or see them as "natural" to them (See Wacquant 2004; Desmond 2007; Benzecry 2011; Shapira 2013). Appreciation with regards to an activity is the result of a process by which individuals attach particular meanings to their practices (Becker 1963), and use their involvement in them to obtain something they cannot get somewhere else.

A particularly important aspect of this sense of enjoyment is the opportunity to embrace a moral self. That is, practices not only reflect a person's sense of morality, but they also constitute it (See Winchester 2008). Participation in social activities allows individuals to engage in the kind of routines that helps them construct a sense of goodness, by personifying proper instances of the social roles they expect to fulfill. As a result, when individuals use their involvement to embody the kind of person they want to be, they are likely to appreciate it as an end in itself.

In addition, a central appeal of routines lies in their intrinsic predictability, which provides people a reassuring sense of order and consistency in their daily experiences (See Auyero and Kilanski 2015). The very regularity of a practice contributes to the feeling of being in control over one's life, especially in times of crisis or in the context of

socioeconomic decline. Through engaging in the same routines over and over, people faced with uncertainty know what to expect of each day.

In sum, commitment to a social activity is the result of a process involving the interaction between an individual's personal background and the routines associated with the activity. When this process leads to a feeling of being in control and the embodiment of an ideal moral self, the routines associated with it are likely to become very appealing. This approach is consistent with the findings of the literature on "activist careers" (See Passy and Giugni 2000; Fillieule 2010; White 2010; Corrigal-Brown 2011). Countless individuals become engaged in collective action, but the length and characteristics of their involvement varies. Like with any other career, the intensity of activism depends on how well it fits with other aspects of a person's sense of self. Hence, the key to understand political participation is to explore its bidirectional relation with other aspects (past and present) of a person's life, and focus on how this relation generates dispositions that sustain involvement –what Nick Crossley (2003) calls a "radical habitus". In the following pages I follow this line of thought to interpret the experiences of participants in my case of study.

The piquetero movement

Starting in the 1980s, Latin America has experienced an unprecedented period of democratization. A majority of countries in the region managed to consolidate

governments elected by citizens, high levels of individual and civic freedoms, and institutional mechanisms for transfer of power that held even in times of civil unrest. However, this period has also coincided with an overall retrenchment of the welfare arm of the state and an expansion in structural unemployment and informality, all related to the extensive neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1970s by both authoritarian and democratic administrations. Most countries suffered significant increases in inequality, marginality and interpersonal violence. Hence, the last decades combine a great expansion of political liberties with both *de facto* and *de jure* abolition of long standing social and economic rights. This scenario has proven fertile ground for the development of new experiences of collective action. Faced with growing opportunities for dissent and contention on the one hand, and the undermining of their means of livelihood on the other, millions of Latin Americans have organized to demand access to a decent standard of living (see Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida 2007; Stahler-Sholk, Varden and Kuecker 2008; Roberts 2008; Delamata 2009; Prevost, Oliva Campos and Varden 2012; Silva 2009 and 2013).

Piquetero organizations have been one of the main expressions of this wave. Despite political and economic instability, for the most part of the 20th century Argentinean workers enjoyed low levels of unemployment, relatively high salaries, and generous welfare policies associated with strong union membership and low levels of informality. However, since the 1970s the country experienced a growing process of deindustrialization, associated with pro-market economic reforms implemented first by

the 1976-1983 military dictatorship, and in a much more intense form by the 1990s administration of Carlos Menem. Unemployment grew from 2.6% in 1980 to 7.4% in 1990 to more than 20% in 2002. The share of manufacturing jobs fell by half, from 24.3% of all jobs in 1990 to 12.8% in 2002. Informal labor doubled, from 22% of all jobs in 1980 to almost 50% in 2002[13]. During the late 1990s, community organizers began to coordinate groups of unemployed workers in the periphery of Argentina's largest cities, demanding access to jobs and relief programs. These groups rapidly developed a flexible organizational structure and a very efficient repertoire of contention[14] that allowed them to gain followers and influence. Most organizations are networks of diverse local groups that stage roadblocks and pickets to demand the distribution of social assistance, usually in the form of foodstuffs and positions in workfare programs. If successful, they distribute these resources among participants, following criteria based on need and merit: whoever has more dependents and contributes more time and effort to the organization is prioritized. Moreover, organizations use part of these resources to develop a vast array of educational, health, and legal services in areas where the welfare arm of the state has retreated. The prospect of obtaining resources needed for survival draws people into these groups, which in turn helps them continue demonstrating for more "jobs, foodstuffs, and plans." As a result, despite ebbs and flows that follow the economic conditions in the

13 Source: CEPAL (2015) and Ministerio de Trabajo, Empleo y Seguridad Social (2010). Despite a period of economic expansion since the early 2000s, these indicators remain relatively weak. The unemployment rate continues to be above 7%, only 13% of all jobs are in the manufacturing sector, and informality continues to affect one third of all employed Argentineans.

14 For the concept of repertoire of contention, see Tilly (1995).

country, for almost two decades the movement has remained a visible actor in popular politics in Argentina, playing an essential role in countless poor neighborhoods.

The trajectories of organizations in the movement have been extensively researched (See Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Massetti 2004 and 2006; Merklen 2005; Svampa 2005 and 2008; Epstein 2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Pereyra 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Gomez 2009). However, the experiences of rank-and-file activists have received much less attention. Although a number of scholars have produced detailed ethnographic studies on the matter, they usually focus on only one event, group or district (see Auyero 2003; Ferraudi Curto 2009; Frederic 2009; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano 2013). The connection between mobilization and other aspects of the lives of activists has received limited attention, especially across different organizations and districts.

My interviews and fieldnotes suggest an intriguing puzzle: even the most committed activists entered their organization in a way that hardly predicted long term participation. Almost all of the recruits to the movement join, in the words of many an informant, "due to necessity": they were in desperate need of resources and a friend, relative or neighbor told them about an organization that was "signing up people" to apply for a social program. The vast majority held negative views of the piquetero movement and had no experience in politics. Once recruited, they started to attend demonstrations and other activities, receiving foodstuffs regularly, until they obtained a

position in a state-funded workfare program. Since organizations usually administer these programs directly, most respondents continued participating to avoid having their position terminated. Not surprisingly, many of these recruits leave when alternative ways of obtaining resources become available (something not hard given the meager pay of workfare programs). However, other participants stay and become increasingly committed, to the point of making personal sacrifices to remain involved: they work long hours to avoid dropping out, reject lucrative offers to participate in other groups, and even prioritize activism over the demands of family life. In the following pages I develop a tentative explanation of how this process takes place, centered on the role of routines.

Data and Methods

The evidence for this paper was collected through ethnographic fieldwork over a period of three and a half years in two Argentinean cities: Buenos Aires and San Salvador de Jujuy. It took place during the summers of 2011, 2012 and 2013, and for a year starting in December of 2013. The results were 1,170 single-spaced pages of notes, as well as recorded interviews with 153 current and former activists from eleven different piquetero organizations.

Fieldnotes and transcripts were analyzed using open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). I first read over them in detail, writing down trends and issues that emerged. I used this list to create a more specific set of codes, which then

served as a guideline to repeat the systematic line-by-line analysis of the data. As a result, I was able to identify both commonalities and variations in the experiences of people in my study.

Fieldwork was divided into two phases. During the summers of 2011 and 2012 I familiarized myself with my object of study and developed contacts with nine different organizations in the Greater Buenos Aires area. I performed 39 individual and 12 group interviews with activists, for a total of 71 respondents. I also participated in different activities their organizations carried out, from meetings and assemblies to special events and demonstrations. I used this information to prepare for the following stages of my project. I centered my research questions on the experiences of people in the movement, and developed a specific methodology to address them. As a result, the second phase of my fieldwork (from May to July of 2013, and from December of 2013 to December of 2014) included a number of modifications. First, I performed longer interviews with current and former activists, and focused not only on their time in the movement, but also other aspects of their lives. I diversified my sample by recruiting people who joined their organization in different years and by including a new city in the sample (San Salvador de Jujuy), to account for both temporal and regional variations in the experiences of activists[15]. Finally, I extended my participant observation to cover the everyday, routine activities that make up most of the time activists spend in the movement.

15 San Salvador de Jujuy was chosen because it differs in substantial aspects from Buenos Aires. The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires concentrates one third of the country's population (more than 13,000,000 people according to the 2010 census), and includes the seats of both the national government

Hence, the bulk of my research at this stage consisted of 93 life-history interviews (See Weiss 1994; Atkinson 2000) with current and former members of different piquetero organizations[16]. The goal was to understand the interrelation between biography and activism for the whole life of each respondent. Thus, interviews took an average of two hours and usually required multiple meetings. My purpose was to obtain a detailed description of the personal history of each subject, in his or her own terms, and to explore how their involvement in a piquetero organization relates to other events in his or her life.

In other words, I followed the advice of Jack Katz (2001 and 2002) of asking "How?" instead of "Why?" questions. I used interviews to carefully reconstruct the experiences of respondents before and after joining a piquetero organization, instead of asking interpretative questions. In part, the reason for this is that people's expressions about motivations are usually poorly associated with their actual behavior (See Jerolmack and Khan 2014). Hence, centering the interviews on the respondent's life rather than his or her viewpoints reduced the (inevitable) effect of the attitudinal fallacy. In addition, the fact that I am Argentinean meant that activists were less likely to perceive me as a neutral

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and the two largest subnational units. In contrast, San Salvador de Jujuy is a much smaller city (about 300,000 inhabitants), the capital of an isolated and relatively poor province. Despite these differences, both cities have strong piquetero organizations.

16 The total number of respondents was thus 153. I interviewed a total of 70 people during the summers of 2011 and 2012, and a total of 93 people during 2013-2014. The difference (153 total respondents, 163 interviews) is because I re-interviewed ten people I had already interviewed during the first phase of my fieldwork. Most were still participating by the end of my research, while fifteen had dropped (and of these, nine dropped during the period I was doing fieldwork, hence I talked to them at different stages of their involvement). All names of respondents have been replaced by pseudonyms.

observer, since in Argentina the social category of "piquetero" is strongly contested. In other words, respondents know that most observers have strong opinions about them, and hence may have felt compelled to provide a "proper response" that obscures their experiences, perceptions and ideas. Only at the end of each interview I asked a general question on their reasons for staying or leaving.

I recruited my respondents by asking people during participant observation if they wanted to be interviewed. If they said yes, we would set up a time and location to meet. In addition, I used snowball sampling to contact dropouts and other activists who were not regularly present at the sites where I did research, with the purpose of increasing the diversity of experiences represented in my sample of respondents. I took particular care in asking for referrals after every interview and from different people in each organization, to reduce the potential bias caused by respondents referring me to people who have similar views as them.

As a result of all these actions, my respondents constitute a very diverse sample. 58.2% of them are women, 40.5% are men, and 1.3% are transgender. Their ages vary from the early 20s to the late 70s. Twenty of them live in San Salvador de Jujuy, and the rest in seven districts of the Greater Buenos Aires and the city of Buenos Aires itself. The majority was born in different provinces of Argentina, while 13 are from neighboring countries. Their personal ideologies range from conservative nationalism to left-wing anarchism. Their time in the movement also varies significantly. Some of the people I

interviewed had only been in their organization a few months, while others had been involved for more than fifteen years.

In addition to providing opportunities for recruiting respondents, participant observation was a source of sociological evidence in its own right. It was the context for illuminating informal conversations, and more crucially, it was my way to witness the *practices* of people in the movement. While interviews were a window into the personal history and perceptions of each activist, participant observation gave me an opportunity to learn about what people do every day in the movement. As a result, in the second phase of my fieldwork I centered on what my respondents call "those days when nothing happens". I continued participating in special events and demonstrations, but I made an effort to observe the daily routines of activists, those unremarkable tasks that constitute the majority of their time in the movement: working in welfare programs, doing paperwork, and having endless meetings.

Findings

Interviews and participant observation suggest that participating in the piquetero movement allows people to reenact, develop, and protect routines associated with an ideal working-class respectable life. When asked about their experiences shortly after joining, most respondents describe a scenario of boredom, shame and confusion:

"I used to get bored because the coordinator talked a lot. He talked and read the organization's script to you, and he explained it, and back then I didn't understand anything about scripts, I didn't understand anything about politics, I didn't understand anything (Tatiana, Interviewed 02/27/2014)

I am proud of being a piquetera*. I used to not like it. I did not like it. I used to say "these bums, they are here bothering everyone, when they could be working". I have no shame now, but I used to be ashamed, I truly was. I did not want to wear the organization's clothes. When I went to events, I went hidden, and came back ashamed* (Priscila, Interviewed 05/19/2014)

However, activists also describe a process of progressively "getting it", and "starting to like it". In other words, my respondents talk about a resignification of their practices in the movement, of understanding the reason behind them:

At the beginning I did not like it, because I entered here due to necessity, I needed to get something, there were no other jobs. I entered here, and a year later I was already leading a neighborhood, and I haven't left since then. I began to get in more, more and I will only leave this place when I die (Valentina, interviewed 02/14/2014)

> [Her first day] *I went to a meeting, and I said "You have to come here to listen to this, you have to hear these stupidities?" I used to say that. Then I began to soak in, soak in, soak in, know the people, that way until I stayed in there, and I am not leaving anymore* (Macarena, interviewed 05/05/2014)

Sometimes this evolution is presented in ideological terms ("The leaders have to convince you", "I learned what we fight for", "I used to be liberal, now I am socialist"). However, other activists talk less about changes in their viewpoints. Some are even indifferent to their organization's ideology. For example, Jazmin claims to love her work in the movement but is not interested in discussing current events in the country:

> *I don't understand politics, and you can't like something that you don't understand. For me politics are super difficult, I don't understand politics much. Well, I participate in what they ask me and go, but I don't like being in politics, I don't understand it, no* (Jazmin, interviewed 05/26/2014)

Other activists are even antagonistic to their group's ideology. For instance, Vanesa joined the movement more than fifteen years ago. She has never left since then, but she openly holds opinions that contradict the group's main standpoints. For instance, she is a strong supporter of the national government under Cristina Kirchner, something that is anathema for Julia, the main leader in her organization:

I think the president is helping us. People may go to her and ask, 'we need stuff for our homes", it may take a bit but she sends help. Previous governments did not do that. Previous governments did not help us at all, unless we went out to protest with the movement.

- And what does Julia tell you when you say that?

Julia laughs and tells me, "I'm gonna kill you, Vanesa". When we go in front of the government's palace, they begin to sing against the president, and I say no-no. I never sing. Julia tells me "Vanesa, sing!", and I don't. That happens all the time (Interviewed 02/13/2014)

Despite these differences, Vanesa has remained loyal to her organization through several divisions. In three and a half years of fieldwork, I barely saw her miss a demonstration or meeting. She is one of the most trusted and experienced members of the group, and in her own views, she cannot bear staying at home when her fellows take the streets:

I once hurt my back moving a stove. I was fifteen days in bed, and then I stayed at home because the doctor forbade me from going out, I could not walk. I sent Julia a paper saying that I was sick, and everything was ok. But then I saw on TV my fellows marching and I went crazy. That is why I always bother Julia, "when do we march?". I love to demonstrate in the streets, I love it (interviewed 02/13/2014)

Examples like Jazmin, who enjoys participating in a political organization despite being indifferent about politics, or Vanessa, who loves going to demonstrations that berate the government she supports, suggests that some activists' attachment to the movement takes place despite and not because of their ideology. This finding is consistent with recent ethnographic research on the piquetero movement. In contrast to early works, which centered on the ideological differences among organizations and assumed that each group's beliefs were shared by a majority of its members (Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008), later studies explored the diversity of viewpoints among rank and file members and demonstrated that piquetero groups were much more internally diverse than previously thought (Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano 2013). Leaders themselves openly accept this situation. As Diego, a member of a far-left organization strongly critical of Peronism told me:

> *In our organization we have folks from every ideology, even, not openly, but we have fellows who are Trotskyists, and the great majority of the people we have organized here are Peronist. Because in this district there are the ideological roots of Peronism. Many of these fellows might not identify with current forms of Peronism, but yes with its roots, Peron, Evita. And well, that's what we are. We are one big unique front, a great political and social alliance that tries to contain everyone* (Interviewed 06/09/2012)

Nevertheless, the ideological diversity prevalent within piquetero organizations does not mean that they do not uphold values and norms. Quite the opposite, entering the movement entails accepting a working class ethos associated with a whole set of expectations, an implicit contract with the organization that Julieta Quiros (2006 and 2011) describes as the equation between "doing and deserving". In other words, piquetero activists are expected to make personal efforts to obtain and maintain benefits. This solves the collective action dilemma that is at the root of each organization: their only way to obtain more resources to sustain themselves is through negotiation with the authorities, but their bargaining power is in direct relation to their mobilization capacity. By demanding that those who receive benefits make efforts to keep them, organizations guarantee their survival. Moreover (and more crucially to this paper's argument) the equation of "doing and deserving" allows the movement to sustain one of its crucial attractions: a working class ethos of discipline and self-sufficiency. Probably the best example of this appeal is Jazmin, which despite her open indifference to politics, loves her involvement in the movement because it allows her to fulfill the social role of a responsible worker. She compares herself favorably to some of her friends who refused offers to join the movement.

> [My friends] *don't want to come here, because they don't want to have a schedule to follow, they don't want to come to the demonstrations. There are people who don't like to do things, they don't like to get up early, come to work. I like it* (Interviewed 05/26/5014)

The fact that people like Jazmin reject ideological debates but feel strongly about the value of hard work reflects a crucial, yet frequently overlooked aspect of piquetero organizations: how they serve as refuges for the routines of a proletarian lifestyle that is vanishing due to the elimination of the kind of jobs that made it possible. The reduction in industrial employment since the 1970s precluded the type of life that working-class Argentineans associate with respectability: a hard-working man who left the house early every day, a woman who raised children and made sure they stayed out of trouble, and the whole family slowly accumulating wealth in the form of their own plot of land and a self-built house. This ideal is embodied in the demand for "genuine work" that is, decently paid, stable blue-collar jobs associated with specific routines, tasks and skills. Few people express this ideal as clearly as Isabel, a retiree with decades of activist experience:

> *These days the government gives you a plan, that's useless, I want that the money from the plan they put into factories, so our grandchildren learn to punch a timecard, so they learn to follow a schedule, just as we learned it, and that they have a good retirement plan, a good salary* (Interviewed 05/06/2014)

This proletarian ethos is certainly not exclusive to Argentina. Michèle Lamont's (2000) study of workers in France and the United States shows that a central component of how her respondents understand their place in the world is a discourse centered on the

ideal of hard work and discipline. Simon Charlesworth (2000) reaches similar conclusions with regards to English workers affected by deindustrialization. As classic studies of working class culture have shown, being a worker is much more than a source of livelihood: it grants access to a comprehensive set of ideas regarding right and wrong (Hoggart 1963; Thompson 1971), a moral code that provides a sense of meaning and self-worth. The appeal of an identity grounded on manual labor remains in place even when the material conditions that sustain it disappear, as demonstrated by studies such as Philippe Bourgois' work on drug dealers in New York (Bourgois 1996) and Loïc Wacquant's ethnography of boxers in Chicago (Wacquant 2004).

A similar process explains the appeal of participation in the unemployed worker's movement: being a piquetero provides both the resources and rationale necessary for engaging in routines associated with a respectable proletarian lifestyle. In other words, activism is a space for actualizing dispositions developed in fields of life that either no longer exist or are in danger of vanishing. Older members reconstruct the practices that they associate with a golden past in which they were breadwinners in a factory line or housewives at home. Younger members develop the kind of habits that they see as respectable, but that they never had the chance to experience due to the lack of industrial labor opportunities. And members in general find a way to protect the routines related to intense socialization in community spaces that is rendered uncommon due to the expansion of interpersonal violence and the collapse of neighborhood institutions. In

sum, people become piquetero activists not only by concurring with a set of ideas, but also through a continuous involvement in the movement's everyday routines.

Reconstruction of past routines

Fernando likes to say that "having a car is not a luxury, but a necessity". He is a short man in his late fifties, with a down-to-earth approach to life's problems, a friendly attitude, and a skill for telling silly jokes. As most of the people I interviewed, he organizes his life history around the different jobs he has held. His experiences are very similar to countless middle-aged people in communities affected by deindustrialization. He dropped out of high school to work as an apprentice in a small workshop, "I wanted to have my own money". His passion for car mechanics and remarkable work capacity helped him climb the ladder of working class positions until he reached his dream job: the assembly line at one of the country's largest automobile factories. He describes his time in this company as a golden age, with a good pay that allowed him to sustain his family comfortably, build a small house, have luxuries such as two cars, and avoiding the need for her wife to work. Moreover, for Fernando being an autoworker meant "being someone". He compensated his lack of education with his work experience and good references: "back then you could get in good factories with an elementary school diploma, with recommendations".

Nevertheless, this lifestyle came to an end in the mid-1990s, as the company's restructuring led to Fernando being laid-off. Like many workers who faced a similar situation around the same time in Argentina, he tried self-employment. However, his new profession as a as a taxi driver was risky and not very profitable. After his car was stolen and the insurance company refused to pay for it, Fernando found himself jobless and more importantly, useless. The work experience and skills accumulated since he was a teenager, that once qualified him for the best paying blue-collar positions, were suddenly not enough to get him even the simplest job. For a man used to sustain his family, the effect was devastating.

Even before he was laid-off, Fernando's wife participated in a soup kitchen run by one of the first piquetero organizations. What started as charity towards others became the main sustenance of a family going through hard times. She convinced Fernando of joining, hoping to obtain a position in a workfare program. They have not left since. In more than fifteen years in the organization, Fernando has performed all sorts of duties. He is in charge of security during organizations, has travelled around the country, and participates in most meetings. He has been involved in housing and sanitation projects, and currently helps with the administration of the many construction cooperatives that the organization runs. Even though other people are in charge of maintenance in the organization's building, his hands are always dirty. On a typical day you can find him first fixing a truck, then chopping wood for a fundraising cookout, and later moving foodstuffs. When someone in the group needs a ride somewhere, he is happy to help.

Fernando seems to love being busy. He is also one of the first to arrive at the building early in the morning, and one of the last to leave. As he repeats with pride, "I know what it means to follow a schedule".

Activists like Fernando learn to use their practices in the movement to reenact habits that they associate with a better time in their lives. These are routines that once constituted an essential component of their personal identity, but that social transformations have rendered impossible. For Fernando –as for many of my interviewees- the problem with joblessness is more than the lack of steady income: it is the feeling that he followed all rules, learned a craft, worked hard, accumulated practical knowledge, and yet he has no role to fulfill in society. His experience is hardly uncommon. Horacio cried when he described the adult men applying for a workfare program in his organization's offices:

> *I saw all those people, all of them my age, there were only two or three young men, that made me sad, because we are, in one word, rejected. Old people have experience, but we are losing that experience […] in this country, if you're old, you're rejected, you're useless, but the knowledge we have, who are we gonna give it to? Who are we gonna teach it to? We'll take it to the grave* (Interviewed on 06/06/2014)

In *Pascalian Meditations*, Pierre Bourdieu explores the predicament of the unemployed. According to Bourdieu, being laid off implies more than simply a threat to sustenance: it is the loss of a whole set of principles that organize daily life. In other words, when Fernando, Horacio and many others were expelled from the labor market, they were deprived of a whole series of routines that provided meaning to their lives:

> Deprived of this objective universe of incitements and indications which orientate and stimulate action and, through it, social life, they can only experience the free time that is left to them as dead time, purposeless and meaningless (Bourdieu 2000: 222)

Activism allows precisely for the reconstructions of these meaningful routines. For Fernando, spending all day fixing things, his hands dirty and his body sweaty, is a way of partaking in the kind of practices that he associates with a golden past. Soon after joining he learned that he could use the organization to reenact the type of life he was used to. Activism provided an excuse to get up early and get tired during the day, he learned of countless ways in which he could fill unwanted free time with purpose. He was trained in new skills, from installing water pipes to arranging people in a demonstration. In an organization of scarce resources, where everything is used and reused, there are always things that need to be fixed. The movement became a surrogate assembly line, where he could feel useful and needed:

I wake up at half past six, so I can be here before eight so I can see what's new, what do we have to do, what can I help with, what do we have to organize. There are days when there are very few things to do and days when you don't have enough time, days in which you have to be here until late, like when they bring foodstuffs, you take, move, everything. Those of us who work here, sometimes we have neither holidays nor free time, because if you have to come here on a Saturday or Sunday, when there are national meetings, those of us who have responsibilities know we have to be here (Interviewed 04/21/2014)

Fernando also finds validation in his proclaimed role of mentor of young men. He proudly describes how he and others "got kids out of drugs" by inviting them to meetings and gradually giving them more responsibilities: "Many of the kids you see here were in the worst things: some were in jail, others smoked cocaine paste a lot. We told them first if they wanted to come help us with the drums, and went from there." By involving boys in the same routines that he cherishes, he not only helps them, but also confirms that those habits are wholesome: there is still value in living your life as a worker. Fernando says that the key to keep kids in the organization is to "give them a space where they feel useful, where they are well contained". He probably does not fully realize that those words also apply to him.

Fernando's mentorship points to another important aspect of the reenactment of working class life in the piquetero movement: a clear gendered division of labor.

Piquetero organizations frequently outperform the state in terms of providing services for women in poor neighborhoods of Argentina. In addition, the scarcity of trained members many time force these organizations to assign non-traditional gender roles to members. However, most activists in the movement continue to support the ideal of a working class family with one main breadwinner. Indeed, many of my interviewees blame the increase in interpersonal violence in Argentina during the last few decades on the fact that many women had to leave their children unattended to go work and complement the reduced family income caused by men's unemployment. Although my respondent's personal histories suggest that women usually worked outside of the home before the increase in unemployment in the 1990s, this idea continues to influence the perceptions of people in the movement:

> *I remember when I was a kid, the only one who worked was my old man. And there was always an adult person in the house. Who checked your homework, controlled you, taught you a lifestyle. In the 90s many lost their jobs, or both parents had to go find work so they could feed their family. The kids were left alone, at home, from home to the street corner, from the street corner to let's see what we do. Those were three steps that were inevitable. I know a lot of kids whose fathers lost their jobs, and they ended up stealing. Many times without the need to steal* (Luis, interviewed 05/13/2013)

In fact, just as men like Fernando reconstruct past routines associated with blue collar labor, women in the movement reenact the type of household duties that were the counterpart of factory work. It is not surprising that the vast majority of women activists I interviewed highlighted traditionally domestic tasks (cooking, cleaning, caring) as the most gratifying aspect of their work, or that "milk coups" (soup kitchens for children) are usually operated by women. For example, Tita interprets her whole activist experience in terms of helping children, despite the fact that she fulfilled many other roles:

> *I worked all my life, but I always thought; one day I will do something for the kids, because I like to be around children. Because I had a childhood that… I was never hungry, but I never had a nice pair of shoes for school, I never had a dress. And now I have the opportunity to give something to kids. And I participate. I go, weigh the kids, take candy, or ice cream in the summer. And I love doing that* (Tita, interviewed 07/30/2011)

Tatiana is part of the administration team in her organization's main office, but she highlights cleaning and cooking as the tasks that make her feel more useful and fulfilled:

> *They assigned me to work in this place about three years ago. I started cleaning here. And that's when I learned more, I like to do all the activities that we need to do, for instance, if we have a meeting and someone has to cook, I like being here*

to cook, If we have an assembly and someone has to clean, I like to be here for cleaning, for everything they tell me to do, because it is something I feel inside me (Interviewed 02/27/2014)

People like Tita and Tatiana describe their fondness of these activities as a deep-seated disposition, something "that comes from the inside". Shortly after joining a piquetero organization, they realized that participation offered them a way to engage in the kind of activities they see as best suited for women. Job insecurity forced many households to adapt their daily life in order to survive, leading to the disruption of basic household activities. As a result, for many women meaningful routines were less possible at home, but could still take place in a social movement. In other words, activism allowed them to reconstruct the domestic habits associated with a lost working class life.

Development of new habits

While the reconstruction of routines makes sense for middle aged activists who remember the certainties and meanings of a life centered on factory labor, many of the members of the movement are too young to have ever experienced that. Working-class Argentineans who came of age on or after the 1990s are much more likely to be exposed to a labor market defined by high structural unemployment, informality, and deindustrialization. Instead of factory employment, the few jobs that promise good pay and prospects of upward social mobility for those without a postsecondary education are

in the service sector (mostly transportation) and in the public sector (usually security and armed forces).

Nevertheless, the appeal of respectable working class life, in the lines of what their parents experienced, is not lost to newer generations. Many have been socialized into the dispositions of factory jobs, and have learned crafts and skills from older relatives. However, the expectations of organizing their lives around the experience of manual labor clash with the reality of substantial transformations in Argentina's economy, which has become more service-oriented and in which the educational credentials necessary to access good jobs are many times out of reach for the poor. Hence, many young men and women are faced with the impossibility of following the kind of honorable proletarian routines they were raised to live. Stable occupation is uncommon, and many depend on odd-jobs and street vending. Even the lucky ones who work in the formal economy are frequently exposed to short-term contracts without benefits. As Leila told me:

> *"I tell you as a young person, the primordial need that shows up in all conversations is employment. Because kids leave high school, and cannot get a job because everywhere they ask for experience. You finish high school, have no experience at all, how can you do to start with your first job? I think that the biggest problem of young people is the lack of jobs. Take for instance, they go to high school, you need two or three pesos every day for the bus, you have to go to*

physical education in the morning or after school, you have to buy books and photocopies, and a lot of kids have a mother that has a lot of children, she cannot facilitate that. So what do kids do? 'well, I'll go and work'. And drop of school. They get some odd-job, but they already lost the school and those odd-jobs will end in nothing" (Interviewed 07/30/2011)

Thus, for many activists participation in a piquetero organization offers the chance to develop an otherwise unfeasible working class lifestyle. They use their participation to engage in habits that they would not have been able to experience otherwise. The movement offers them an adoptable "narrative identity" (Sommers 1994) centered on the demand of "genuine work", and a series of practices that reproduce the expectations and demands of blue-collar life. It also makes those practices possible by granting a stream of resources that addresses the basic needs of members and their families; by teaching the disappearing skills associated with being good workers; and by generating a space where those abilities are still useful.

The importance of a source of livelihood resides in the fact that if piquetero organizations were not able to distribute foodstuffs and positions in workfare programs, most its members would be forced to seek resources somewhere else. This would severely reduce the capacity of these organizations to keep young members, given that these are the most likely to be able to obtain the type of odd-jobs available for undereducated Argentineans (construction for men, housecleaning for women). In other

words, making a meager income in a workfare program makes activism possible, even if "just barely making it". Jonathan attributes to this income his capacity to stay free from the drug epidemic ravaging his friends:

> *I am a kid that perhaps you might be doing drugs and I can be next to you, everything is ok. But I will not use drugs, you know? So for them, I am like anti-drugs, I am like a snitch. And I am just a healthy kid. I am not gonna do drugs to be in good terms with those guys, to form a link with that group. No. With what I am earning here, I sustain myself and my daughter. When I entered this organization I did not even have a bicycle, I had nothing. With the 1,200 pesos I make I was able to buy my motorcycle. When I worked in other places I could not buy anything. I got used to this. I know my limits, how much I can spend, how much I cannot spend* (Interviewed 06/01/2012)

The organization not only provides a livelihood, it also teaches important skills associated with a working-class respectable life. Some of these are specific to a certain craft, like the sanitation projects where young people learn to install water pipelines. Or the course where Patricio, after his release from juvenile detention, is learning how to become an electrician. Or Constanza's cooking class, which offers an official degree. Organizations also help young people develop other dispositions that are seen as fading due to the lack of blue-collar jobs, such as having discipline at work, following a schedule, and dealing with conflicts in the workplace. Even though government

supervision of workfare programs is frequently lax, piquetero groups usually keep track of attendance and discipline, and it is common for members to be reprimanded due to unpunctuality or absenteeism.

Moreover, the expectations inculcated to young members of the movement also reflect the ideal proletarian family with a strong gendered division of labor. Boys tend to be assigned to infrastructure projects, while girls are far more likely to choose training programs associated with household chores. In addition, while all young members are compelled to have discipline at work and self-restraint at home, the actual meaning of these ideals is gender-specific: for men, being a responsible worker means waking up early during the week and limiting alcohol consumption to the weekends. Expectations for women also include childrearing duties, in the form of prioritizing care of children over other personal objectives.

Finally, piquetero organizations not only teach specific crafts and instill working-class dispositions; they also create a space where those skills are appreciated. In a context where young people are exposed to significant job instability, with short periods of intense employment in odd-jobs followed by extended intervals of idleness, working in a workfare program or a grassroots cooperative offers predictable routines and considerable in-group recognition for the kind of abilities that Argentina's marginalized and undereducated youth can offer.

In sum, younger members of piquetero organizations commit to their organizations by engaging in similar working-class routines than their older counterparts. However, while for their parent's generation this is may be a work of reconstruction, for them it entails the development of new habits. In a context with limited opportunities for personal development, the movement offers a working class ethos, plus the resources and training to exercise it. Certainly, many young people fail to develop these new routines, but for others, these habits become mechanisms through which they become activists

Protection of endangered practices

It is a hot Friday in late December, and the Ministry of Social Welfare has announced that they will deliver non-perishable foodstuffs to one of the organizations I do research on. The group will distribute them to their network of soup kitchens, and to their members. A group of leaders has traveled to a deposit from where the goods will be shipped, distant about fifty kilometers from the building where we wait for their arrival. They left early in the morning, but it is almost noon and there is still no sign of them.

The long wait, combined with high temperatures in the building (a semi-abandoned, two-story deposit), make people sleepy. To make hours pass faster, different groups talk and drink mate. Among them is the health commission, five women of different ages in charge of measuring the weight of children at soup kitchens, informing about health campaigns, and distributing donations of health supplies to schools. Their

small upstairs office has an old fan that stops working every five minutes, and we have fun trying to fix it with a butter knife. We also talk about the upcoming vacations: one of them will visit relatives outside the city, another will go to the beach with her family, most will just stay at home. Downstairs, a group of people begin cooking a stew. Someone asks Alejandro about a recent visit to the doctor: he needs gallbladder surgery, and has to follow a very strict diet. Someone in the group has prepared him a special meal. People suggest different herbs that can help his situation, but Alejandro responds that he has tried them all.

Individuals in the building are supposed to be involved in "productive projects", but with the heat today only a portion of the time is spent actually producing. For instance, Ornella became a carpenter by helping her father, and now coordinates a small group of people who are beneficiaries of a workfare program. In exchange of a small sum of money, they come three days a week and learn the craft. This morning, however, none of them seems to be working. Instead, they are engaged in an animated chat. Ornella jokes that her group might not be doing much, but neither is the people at the serigraphy workshop located in the room next door. Indeed, so much noise of laughter comes from there, that Ornella compares them to a flock of clucking chickens: "throw them some corn!" she shouts.

Finally, around 1:30pm a fully loaded eighteen-wheeler arrives. Everybody makes a human chain and begin moving several tons of food to a storage room in the back of the

building. It is an exhausting, dirty job, and most of us sweat profusely. Moreover, many of the people working are elderly, and the task takes its toll on them. However, I barely hear anyone complain. After hours of waiting for the truck to arrive, the perspective of getting the work done gets people in a great mood. People ask each other about their weekend plans. Alejandro teases Facundo, insisting that he should invite out one of the young women in the group. People make spicy jokes. Olivia makes everyone laugh by pretending to do a "sexy dance". By the time we finish, people line up to receive some of the foodstuffs, and jokes continue about those who cut in line.

Scenes such as these are common in the organizations I studied. Members rarely work alone, and instead spend most their time with others. Many stay longer than the required hours, and it is not uncommon for people to visit during vacations and holidays. Organizations seem to serve as places of intense socialization, where people share meals, chat, and gossip. Participants use the movement to engage in valuable and enjoyable routines that are perceived as being threatened by changes in their social context. In other words, piquetero groups offer a safe space where certain practices can be shielded from transformations that endanger their continuance.

In the case of Argentina, the expansion of unemployment strongly undermined the material conditions for a number of established routines in working-class neighborhoods: Community institutions were depleted of resources, state services were cut, and interpersonal violence skyrocketed. Hence, wholesome habits associated with public life

(such as spending time with neighbors, playing in the streets, and sharing communal spaces) are perceived to be disappearing. Few situations make this context as salient as the increase in drug-related violence that afflicts many of Argentina's poor neighborhoods (See Auyero and Berti 2015). Almost all of my respondents who complained about the decline in community life emphasized that the use of heavier drugs by younger people is taking over public spaces:

> *Back then people consumed what they consume today, except for cocaine paste, that is new. People consumed marijuana and cocaine. That stuff always existed, only that in the past it used to be at parties and between four walls. Now they do that in the streets* (Bianca, interviewed 07/08/2014)

In this context of increased deprivation and deteriorated public life, the practices of activists in the piquetero movement become increasingly important as people learn to use them to sustain valuable routines that are seen as endangered. Piquetero organizations become oases of socialization, as people in them are able to spend time with others, in relative safety. In other words, people "feel comfortable", as the movement offers a space for engaging in all sorts of practices that are rendered increasingly difficult due to the lack of stable employment and the deterioration of public life in their communities.

Conclusions

Civic engagement is essential for the maintenance of a vigorous and inclusive democracy, as it offers diverse ways to petition the authorities, articulate demands, and increase the pace of social change. Social movements are particularly important for marginalized populations, who have limited access to the formal channels of political representation. However, some aspects of the process by which people become involved in it remain understudied. This paper has sought to complement the extensive research on social movement participation by exploring the role that routines have in the development and sustainment of activism. I argue that some members of the piquetero movement develop commitment to their organizations by enjoying their practices while mobilized. In particular, they use their involvement to reenact, develop and protect routines associated with a vanishing working class lifestyle.

These results bring up four interrelated themes for discussion. First, practices might be as important as ideologies for explaining the development of activism. In other words, it is not merely what people think that matters, but also, what they do. We need to complement our understanding of the relation between beliefs and contention with a more nuanced exploration of the role of routines. Second, understanding the joys of activism requires us to open our theoretical horizons and include literature on other aspects of social life –such as marihuana smoking (Becker 1963), boxing (Wacquant 2004), firefighting (Desmond 2007) or opera-going (Benzecry 2011). In other words, current research on political participation can be supplemented with theories beyond social movement studies. In order to do that, we need to engage a broader debate, and see

activism as a particular instance of more general phenomena. Third, if mobilization becomes enjoyable due to its resonance with the backgrounds of activists, then we must assign to their experiences outside of the movement the same explanatory value as those inside the movement. Given that participants themselves see activism as inseparable from other aspects of themselves, we should not compartmentalize in theory spheres that are united in real life. Finally, social movement theory tends to overestimate the importance of extraordinary events for mobilization. Collective action is described as an experience that breaks with people's routines and exposes them to new habits and ways of thinking. While the life-changing potential of activism is clear, we should not discount the possibility that its appeal can also lie in its ordinary, everyday aspects.

Notwithstanding its importance, the development of activism defies simple explanations. Participation in contention usually entails significant efforts and sacrifices, and success is rarely guaranteed. Still, some people cannot have enough of it. Activism attracts some individuals deeply, while others in a similar situation never participate. The processes that lead people to enjoy civic engagement thus remain in part an enigma, the answer to which can have significant political implications. A more nuanced understanding of them can help us promote grassroots development and sustain community life, especially in those contexts where it is most necessary.

Chapter 4 – Popular Politics and the Trajectory of the Piquetero Movement

Introduction

During the last three decades, Latin America has witnessed an impressive expansion in democratic rule. Most countries in the region have managed to sustain governments elected by citizens, high levels of individual and civic freedoms, and institutional mechanisms for transfer of power that held even in times of civil unrest. However, this period has also coincided with the undermining of long-standing labor rights, a substantial increase in social inequality, and profound economic reforms that reduced opportunities for upward social mobility. And while political repression has declined, interpersonal violence has skyrocketed, especially among marginalized populations. Latin American societies thus remain in a state of uncertainty, as they struggle to combine effective democratic governance with the reduction of systemic inequalities of opportunity.

Grassroots movements have been a central actor in the region's recent past, and they remain crucial for its future. They have contributed to the sustainment of democracy, providing impetus to transitional processes and demanding the enforcement of human rights. In addition, they remain at the forefront of efforts to address economic inequalities and expand access to basic social services (see Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida

2007; Stakler-Sholk, Varden and Kuecker 2008; Roberts 2008; Delamata 2009a; Prevost, Oliva Campos and Varden 2012; Silva 2009 and 2013). Nevertheless, capturing the complexity, diversity and contradictions of most of these movements remains a challenge. The literature tends to lump together experiences that are diverse in nature, select against instances of failed mobilization, and downplay the links between grassroots activism and other instances of political life (For a review see Roberts 2008).

This paper contributes to address these limitations by exploring the trajectory of one of Latin America's most recent and influential experiences of collective action: the Unemployed Worker's Movement in Argentina. During the late 1990s, community leaders began to organize groups of unemployed people and their families all across the nation, in order to protest against the consequences of neoliberal reforms. Their use of roadblocks to demand social assistance in the context of record-high joblessness gave the movement its name: *piqueteros*, or road-blockers. These organizations rapidly became one of the most visible instances of protest in the years leading to the 2001-2002 economic collapse of the country. However, despite accumulating significant resources, mobilization capacity, and a great deal of support, they failed to sustain their momentum after 2003, and gradually lost much of their mobilization capacity.

The narrative prevalent among scholars on this case is one of decline caused by shrinking political opportunities. According to this interpretation, prior to 2003 the movement expanded thanks to the weaknesses of a system besieged by years of deep

recession. However, after 2003 a new governmental coalition took advantage of economic recovery to reconstitute the political system and weaken the piqueteros through harassment, divisions and cooptation. Mainstream media switched from positive coverage of roadblocks to a stigmatization campaign. Previous allies, such as the urban middle classes and big unions, ceased to be supportive as their economic outlook improved.

I aim to put forward an alternative interpretation, based on three ideas. First, I argue that there has not been a decline of piquetero organizations, but rather a strengthening of their core structures. While it is true that these groups mobilize less people than fifteen years ago, they now have more organizational resources, know-how, and recognition by state officials than before. More importantly, most of them have developed an inner circle of committed participants, combining seasoned community organizers with newer members who originally joined to address immediate needs, but gradually developed attachment to the group.

Second, I contend that this strengthening took place not despite the post-2003 political context, but rather *because* of it. While the years following the economic collapse of 2001-2002 presented substantial challenges for organizations, it also offered significant opportunities for accessing state support. In the short run, like many Latin American governments around the same time, the new national administration that emerged in 2003 sought to incorporate social movements into its coalition of support. In

the longer run, structural transformations in social policies since the 1990s opened up the possibility for a symbiotic relation between public officials and even the most radical piquetero organizations. State agencies reduced costs and lightened their workload by delegating the management of focalized social policies into networks of local actors, while activists acquired organizational resources they could not obtain anywhere else.

Third, I advocate for a new conceptualization of piquetero organizations, in order to better understand how the post-2003 context affected them. I complement earlier studies on the movement (such as Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008) with ethnographic analyses of popular politics in Argentina (Auyero 2001 and 2003; Grimson, Ferraudi Curto and Segura 2009; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano 2013), as well as my own fieldwork, to emphasize the connections between piquetero groups and other instances of community life in the country's working class neighborhoods. Despite their innovative aspects, unemployed worker's organizations have been more the continuance of other instances popular politics than distinctive and novel cases of contention. Their embeddedness in local political traditions, rather than their separation from them, was what allowed piquetero groups to remain active despite ebbs and flows in their number of adherents.

Analyzing the trajectory of the piqueteros entails more than just studying one of Latin America's most interesting instances of collective action by the poor. It can also offer insight into changes in the regional political climate in the last decades. Grassroots

movements have been a driving force behind the "left turn" in Latin American governments since the early 2000s, and have pushed for the expansion of economic, social and political rights for marginalized segments of society (see Johnston and Almeida 2006; Almeida 2007; Stakler-Sholk, Varden and Kuecker 2008; Roberts 2008; Delamata 2009a; Wolford 2010; Prevost, Oliva Campos and Varden 2012; Silva 2009). Thus, studying the connections between contentious collective action and other forms of politics is central for understanding the challenges faced by democratic regimes in the region.

Social movement trajectories: beyond cycles of contention

Social movement literature has traditionally focused more on the emergence of contention than on its sustainment and decline (Voss 1996; Owens 2009). As a result, our understanding of the mechanisms that lead to the weakening of protest is much less developed than our knowledge of how it emerges and thrives (Lapegna 2013).

One of the main ways in which scholars have analyzed the decline of collective action has been through studies on cycles of contention (Tarrow 1989 and 1994; Della Porta 1995). Social movements tend to cluster in time: the successes of early risers act as a demonstration effect to other actors, thus generating a self-reinforcing process that leads to an outburst of collective action. Eventually, however, political opportunities begin to change. Tensions among movements emerge, adversaries become empowered,

the public loses interest, allies withdraw their support, and participants begin to withdraw due to exhaustion, despair or cynicism (Hirschman 1982; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 2004; Gould 2009). Thus, the cycle comes to an end.

This literature has been very informative on the processes that affect collective action at the societal level. However, it assumes a symmetry between the emergence and decline of collective action that rarely takes place in reality. In other words, the weakening of contention is not its emergence in reverse: it is a process in its own right, with particular mechanisms and determinants (Edwards and Marullo 1995). The literature's bias towards the emergence of collective action has led us to explore its decline largely through extrapolations: if a set of conditions leads to the growth of contention, then the disappearance of those conditions must lead to the demise of protest.

In other words, the decline of mobilization is much more complex than what the idea of cycles of contention would lead us to believe. For the most part, movements do not just vanish: they leave traces on society at large, on their immediate context, and on their members (Giugni 1998 and 2008; Amenta *et al* 2010). Organizations rarely disappear when unrest and mobilization leave way to more settled times, or when contentious topics wane from public attention. Thus, it is more accurate to conceive of the decline of collective action in terms of latency or postponement. As Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor (1987) argue in their study of pre-1960s feminism, during times of acquiescence social organizations serve as "abeyance structures", in which committed

activists sustain their involvement despite the weakening of mobilization around them. Thus, even though a movement might seem to be in decline, if its core structures remain in place it will regrow rapidly once its context becomes more favorable for protest. A similar idea is expressed by Alberto Melucci's concept of "submerged networks" (1989): groups of activists that remain active during settled times, and that provide the impetus for further mobilization when the occasion arises.

Therefore, social movements do not develop out of thin air or evaporate when their influence wanes. Nor do they function in a vacuum: activists are always embedded in a social environment that shapes their work in terms of their message (Snow *et al* 1986; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994; Benford and Snow, 2000), trajectories (Viterna 2013), motivations (Jasper 1997; Wood 2003), resources (Morris 1984) and repertoires (Tarrow 1994). As a result, cases of completely novel forms of collective action are uncommon. Historically, contention has emerged out of previous instances of mobilization, and combined innovative aspects with strong adherence to established notions, routines and tactics (Thompson 1963 and 1971; Sewell 1980; Tilly 1986 and 1995). Therefore, understanding a social movement entails exploring its immersion in a particular historical context. Just as the practices of activists make little sense if we only consider their experiences inside the movement, we are unlikely to understand the trajectories of grassroots organizations without paying attention to their environment. In particular, since the remnants of previous protests are crucial for the emergence of new

movements, then it is crucial to incorporate in our analysis the networks of individuals that keep the flame of mobilization alive, ready to be used by future activists.

Understanding the mechanisms that sustain collective action in all contexts is essential because social movements have been one of the main driving forces behind the expansion of civil, political and social rights in the last few centuries (Tilly 2004). Probably in few occasions this has been as evident as in Latin America's recent history. First, movements have played an active role in the democratization process that started in the early 1980s, denouncing human rights violations, demanding free elections, and developing connections with the international community that increased pressure on authoritarian regimes. Second, activists have pushed for the enactment and implementation of specific social and economic rights, addressing the needs of marginalized populations and developing new forms of expressing demands to the authorities (Almeida 2007; Roberts 2008; Delamata 2009a). Finally, in the last fifteen years governments all across the region have sought to incorporate grassroots organizations into their coalitions of support, leading to an increased influence of their members in policy making (Burbach, Fox and Fuentes 2013; Prevost, Oliva Campos and Varden 2012; Baker and Greene 2011; Stahler-Sholk, Varden and Kuchner 2008). These organizations developed out of previous instances of collective action, and had from the beginning strong ties with other forms of political life in their countries. In other words, social movements, in Latin America as in any other part of the world, are part of a context. Few cases demonstrate this as clearly as the piqueteros.

Data and methods

For this paper I use three different sources of evidence: in-depth interviews with current and former piquetero activists; databases of contentious events; and secondary sources in the form of an extensive literature by scholars, journalists and organizers.

The first source of evidence was collected through ethnographic fieldwork over a period of three and a half years in two Argentinean cities: Buenos Aires and San Salvador de Jujuy. It took place during the summers of 2011, 2012 and 2013, and for a year starting in December of 2013. The results were 1,170 single-spaced pages of notes, as well as recorded interviews with 153 current and former activists from eleven piquetero organizations[17]. Their experiences reflect different moments in the history of the movement: 26.5% of them joined their organization in the 1990s, 54.7% did so between 2000 and 2009, and 17.9% were recruited in 2010 or after[18].

Interview transcripts and fieldnotes were processed using open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995; also see Weiss 1994). I first read over them in detail, writing down trends that emerged. I used this preliminary list to create a more

[17] 58.2% of my respondents are women, 40.5% men, and 1.3% transgender. Their ages vary from the early 20s to the late 70s. Twenty of them live in San Salvador de Jujuy, and the rest in seven districts of the Greater Buenos Aires and the city of Buenos Aires itself. The majority was born in different provinces of Argentina, while 13 are from neighboring countries. Their overall ideological stances range from conservative nationalism to left-wing anarchism.

[18] Three of the respondents were unclear as to the year in which they joined.

specific set of codes, which then served as a guideline to repeat the systematic line-by-line analysis of the data. As a result, I was able to identify trends in the experiences of people in my study, as well as in the trajectory of their organizations.

The second source consists of two databases of contentious events. The first one was created by the Study Group on Social Protest and Collective Action (GEPSAC) of the University of Buenos Aires. It includes all protests registered between 1983 and 2006 in Argentina's two most widely read newspapers, *Clarin* and *La Nacion*, classified by variables such as the actors involved, the repertoire used, and the demands expressed[19]. It provides a unique perspective on the importance (compared to other experiences of mobilization) of piquetero organizations during the key years that surrounded Argentina's 2001-2002 economic collapse. The second database was created by Nueva Mayoria, a think tank located in Buenos Aires. It registers all roadblocks that took place in Argentina between 1997 and 2007. I chose this decade as it marks the point where this repertoire was closely associated with the piquetero movement, hence providing an approximate idea of the extent of its presence in the streets[20].

The third source consists of the abundant literature on the piqueteros, written both by academics (Massetti 2004; Svampa 2005 and 2008; Epstein 2006 and 2009; Torres

[19] For a full description of the methodology of this database, see Schuster *et al* (2006)

[20] From 1997 to 2004, 4 out of 5 roadblocks were carried out by the *piqueteros*. Starting in 2005 this proportion began to decrease rapidly: by 2006-2007, it had declined to 1 in 5. In 2008, nation-wide protests by landowners and rural producers caused the number of roadblocks to soar, but less than 1% of these protests were organized by piquetero groups. See Nueva Mayoria (2008 and 2009).

2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Battistini 2007; Pereyra 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Gomez 2009; Ferraudi Curto 2009; Frederic 2009; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano 2013), Journalists (Schneider Mansilla and Conti 2003; Young 2008; Russo 2010; Boyanovski Bazam 2010) and activists (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD Solano 2002; Kohan 2002; Mazzeo 2004; Oviedo 2004; Flores 2005 and 2007, Gomez and Massetti 2009). Combined, they provide a rich account of the history of the movement, and the perceptions of different actors involved.

The combination of three types of data provides the opportunity to identify diverse mechanisms that affected the trajectory of the movement, as well as to observe the same events from different perspectives. Such methodological triangulation (Denzin *et al* 1978) allows for checking the robustness of hypotheses and addressing the limitations of each specific source of evidence. In particular, secondary sources and databases of contentious events serve as a check against a potential problem with my interview data: the inaccuracies in my respondent's recollections of past events, some of which took place almost two decades ago (see Weiss 1984).

Blocking roads for bread and work: the piquetero movement.

The unemployed worker's movement emerged during the second half of the 1990s, as a response to the increase in poverty and unemployment produced by the neoliberal economic reforms implemented by the national government. Community

organizers began to establish groups of unemployed workers and their families in different Argentinean cities, demanding access to jobs and relief programs. These groups rapidly developed a flexible organizational structure and a very efficient repertoire of contention that helped them recruit members and gain influence. Most organizations are networks of local groups that stage roadblocks and pickets to demand the distribution of social assistance, usually in the form of foodstuffs and positions in workfare programs. If successful, they distribute part of these resources among participants, and use the rest to develop a vast array of educational, health, and legal services in areas where the welfare arm of the state has retreated. The prospect of obtaining resources needed for survival draws people into these groups, which in turn helps them continue demonstrating for more "jobs, foodstuffs, and plans".

During its first years of existence, the movement experienced an extraordinary growth, which led it to become a major actor in national politics. By the year 2002, it had recruited thousands of activists, had been one of the main protagonists in the protests of December 2001 –which contributed to the fall of the national government and the establishment of an interim administration-, and had forced significant changes in public policies.

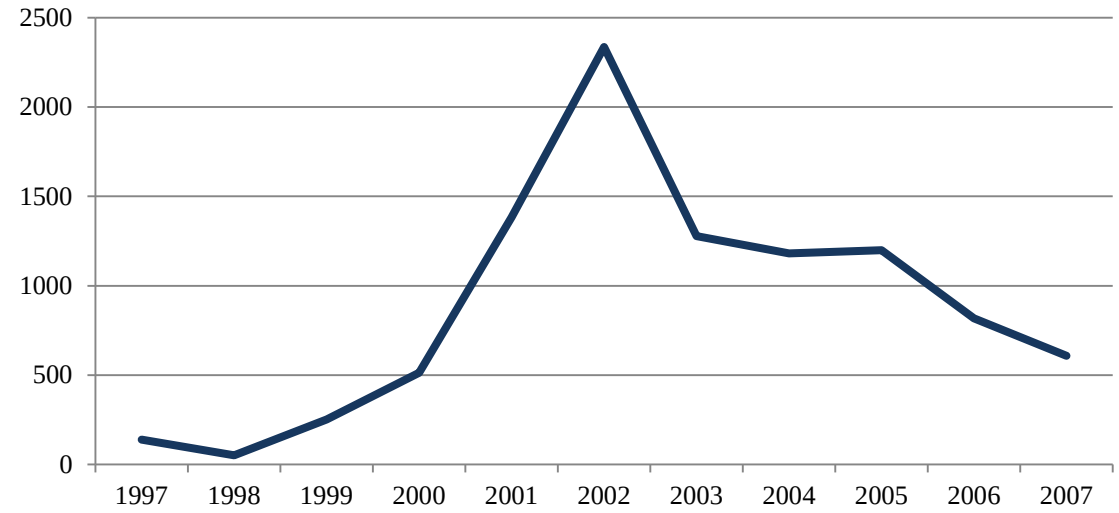
Nevertheless, eventually the movement failed to sustain this expansion. After peaking in the early years of the decade, organizations began to lose members and

mobilization capacity. The emergence of a center-left government in 2003 introduced a deep division between those groups that supported the presidencies of Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015) and those which opposed them. In addition, labor market expansion and the improvement in the capacity of the state to address social needs substantially affected organizations that emerged in a context of recession and job loss. Finally, support for the movement declined as other issues emerged in the agenda and as the economic outlook of middle-class protesters and unions improved.

Quantitative evidence strongly supports a scenario of lost momentum. Figure 1, from the Nueva Mayoria database, shows that the number of roadblocks in the country peaked during the year 2002 and declined afterwards. Figure 2, using data from the GEPSAC, shows the percentage of registered protests in Buenos Aires in which piquetero organizations participated. It reveals that the unemployed worker's movement was a major driving force in protests around the city until the year 2004, when its relative importance began to decline substantially[21]. Both databases suggest that after 2004 the *piqueteros* ceased to be the main protagonists of urban protests and roadblocks.

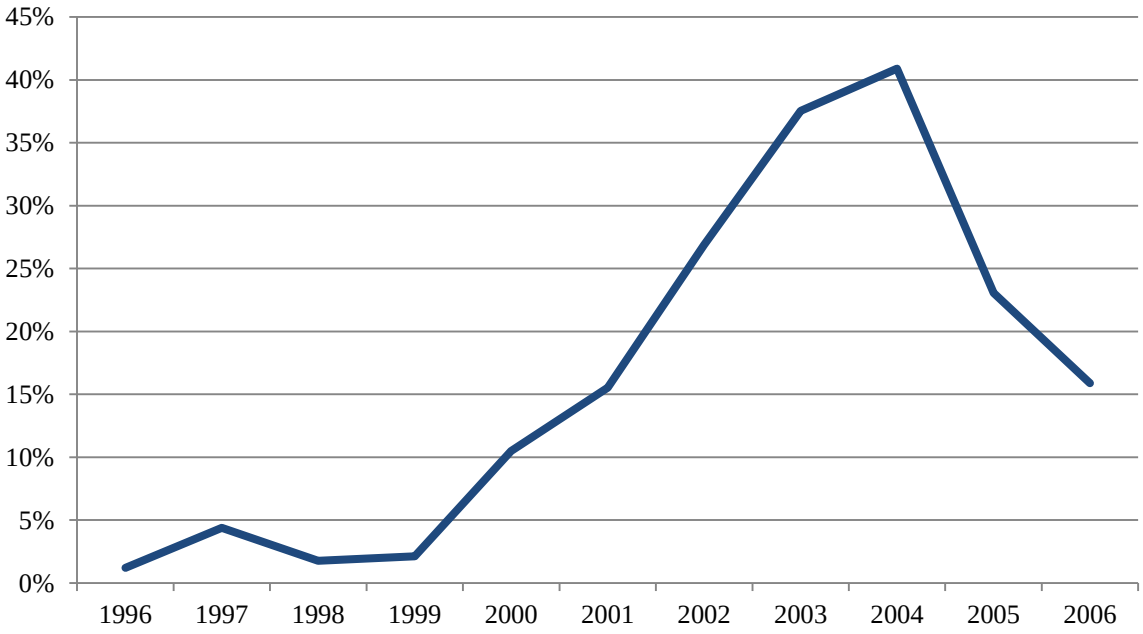
[21] From peaks of 37.5% in 2003 and 40.8% in 2004, the percentage of protests with piquetero participation fell to 23.1% in 2005 and 15.9% in 2006.

Figure 1 - Number of roadblocks - Argentina, 1997-2007



Source: Nueva Mayoría (2009)

Figure 2 - Percentage of all registered protests with participation of piquetero organizations - Buenos Aires, 1996-2006



Source: Author's analysis based on the GEPSAC database.

Scholars on the piquetero movement tend to describe this scenario as one of marked decline caused by changes in the structure of political opportunities (Svampa 2005 and 2008; Epstein 2006 and 2009; Torres 2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Battistini 2007; Pereyra 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Gomez 2009; Delamata 2009b). According to this narrative, the post-2003 context was characterized by demobilization, caused by media stigmatization, a government that tried to divide the movement, and decreased support of the middle classes and big unions. For instance, as Maristella Svampa argues:

> Once the moment of social effervescence and the ephemeral resonance with the middle classes had passed, by mid-2004, piquetero organizations found themselves in the streets with a high level of social isolation, but in a political context very different to the one of previous years. The displacement of social conflicts towards unions and the explosion of socio environmental conflicts put a veil of indifference and invisibility over the actions of piquetero organizations, for the most part weakened, encapsulated in the work in their neighborhoods and with scarce opportunities of making their claims heard (2008b, p. 11. My translation)

Sebastian Pereyra, German Perez and Federico Schuster concur with this view. In their exhaustive 2008 volume *La Huella Piquetera*, coauthored with a dozen scholars on collective action in Argentina, they contend that the reconstitution of the political system that had been affected by the crisis posed substantial threats to the movement's

endurance. They compare the 2001-2002 context with the scenario six years later in the following terms:

> From a moment [2001] in which there was a (failed) attempt towards the unity of the piquetero movement, and in which mobilization produced a public recognition of the unemployment problem and the main leaderships at the national level, to another, current one, in which mobilization seems to be an exhausted resource – replaced by alignment with the government, negotiation, or retreat- and where even the specificity of piquetero movements seems to be in doubt (2008, p. 19. My translation).

Gabriela Delamata, another prominent Argentinean researcher, also agrees with such an scenario:

> In sum, between the negative of the government to incorporate their demands, and the discredit of mobilization and protests, the space of action of piquetero organizations in the streets virtually dissolved, concentrating more and more their energies in the defense of the right to make claims (2009b, p. 98. My translation)

In sum, many scholars on Argentinean politics describe the piquetero movement more as a component of the crisis of 2001-2002 than as a current process, even though in the three and a half years covered by my fieldwork (July 2011- December 2014) rarely a

week passed without a major protest or rally by one of these groups. As recently as January 2015, the introduction to a special edition of a Latin American studies journal on Argentinean politics in the last decade referred to the *piqueteros* in the past tense:

> There were many other movements. The best-known is the *piquetero* movement, which organized among the unemployed to obtain government aid. Its favorite tactics were blockading highways and massive mobilizations in front of supermarkets, forcing them to hand out food. This movement rapidly split into factions, including the Bloque Piquetero, headed by the PCA, the PO, and independents; the Corriente Clasista y Combativa (Classist and Combative Current—CCC), headed by the Maoist Partido Comunista Revolucionaria (Communist Revolutionary—PCR); groups led by Peronists such as Luis D'Elía; nationalist groups such as Barrios de Pie, led by the Corriente Patria Libre (Free Country Tendency); and a confederation of independent left organizations loosely grouped as the Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados "Darío Santillán" (Darío Santillán Movement of Unemployed Workers) (Pozzi and Nigra 2015, p. 5)

In the following pages I propose an alternative interpretation. The post-2003 trajectory of the piquetero movement should be interpreted not in terms of decline, but instead of strengthening of the core structures of most organizations. The vast majority of the groups mentioned in the above paragraph (plus countless others) are still active and

have accumulated a great number of material resources and human capital over the years. Moreover, this strengthening was made possible by the political context after 2003, which despite posing dilemmas to many organizations has been much more conducive to social mobilization than previously thought.

Strengthening of core structures

Even though they failed to maintain their momentum in 2001-2002, organizations in the piquetero movement have not vanished. Over the years most groups have accumulated substantial resources and know-how. In particular, there are three aspects in which piquetero organizations are in a much better shape than 15 years ago: (a) their recognition as managers of social policies; (b) the number of skilled, committed activists they rely on, and (c) the amount of organizational resources they have.

First, piquetero organizations are recognized by the authorities as managers of social assistance. Interactions between activists and public officials reveals a working relationship despite frequent ideological disagreements. Ties between both actors have cemented over the years as part of the way politics are done, especially at the local level. Channels of communication remain open even during times of conflict and for organizations both opposed and allied with the national government (Quiros 2011; Battezzati 2012):

Extract from fieldnotes, 07/18/2014

The leaders' meeting was about the same issues as always: plans and beneficiaries. Gimena explained a situation that had happened with some beneficiaries. From there, the meeting moved to the main issue: the taxes beneficiaries have to pay. Diego said that it has been a mistake to tell them not to pay. He said that even though paying 73 pesos per month is a lot given that they only make 1000 pesos, there's no other way out because otherwise they will have problems with the plans. Oscar got in the conversation and said "we already decided that all fellows must pay it".

Something to which Diego and Oscar referred a lot are the "contacts" and "political deals" that the organization has with diverse state offices. First, the group has "frenemies", "friends" and "contacts" within organizations and agencies that are officially adversarial. Now, these "friends" are not spies or undercover allies: Oscar and other leaders describe them as opponents that for different reasons have an interest in keeping a good relation with the group. Second, the "political deals" are described as deals that emerge out of negotiations, and which allow for the twisting or adaptation of the requirements of diverse social plans.[…]

Oscar talked more in detail about these "deals" and "contacts". He said that [the leader of an adversarial organization] is giving them a hand with the license

for the radio. He said he's doing it "because he's a politician. He knows that perhaps a year and a half from now they may be throwing rocks with us". Lucrecia said "let's not forget he got us the lands to build some houses". They also mentioned the contacts they have with the social security office.

As the above fieldnote illustrates, ideological differences have not prevented most piquetero organizations from developing connections with politicians at the local, provincial and national level. These connections serve as ways to share useful information and solve problems that may emerge in the implementation of assistance programs. In the previous case, when some members of one organization were asked to pay a specific tax, the first reaction of activists was to contact their "frenemies" in the government to ask for details. After the workload of one program became too demanding for certain participants, the group negotiated a "political deal" that exempted these individuals from specific requirements. In other words, state officials help organizations in many different ways, seeking to ensure a swift implementation of social policies and avoiding open conflict as much as possible

Second, while the membership of most piquetero groups has dwindled, their core still consists of skilled activists with a strong attachment to their organizations. That is, most groups have been able to turn at least a portion of the people who join "due to necessity" into committed cadres. Despite the fact that almost no new member joins the

movement due to ideological sympathy, few have extensive political experience, and most face significant barriers to participation, some of them gradually develop a strong attachment to the group, to the point of making sacrifices to remain involved. As a result, over time most piquetero organizations have developed an inner core of reliable, dedicated and experienced members. Demonstrations might be less crowded than fifteen years ago, but organizations the movement is full of long-term, "iron fellows" who are willing to make significant sacrifices to remain involved:

> *I was out of job, although I could do some odd-jobs. Actually, I got in here due to the courses, a course to become an electrician, so when I decided to stay I had entered due to a course. And well, after that I began to learn more about the struggle, and the motives. And well, I stayed, I stayed and I do not move from here anymore.[…] You know, I was one of the* contras*, I was one of those who thought that the piqueteros were people who did not want to work, were some fucking* negros[22] *who blocked and did not let me get to my job, and all that. I mean, no one convinced me of anything, I got here and saw it was not that way, that is why I stayed.* (Sergio, interviewed 06/01/2012)

> *They asked me if I wanted… if, what would happen if I talk with my organization so I could work as shift manager with the municipality. Because [I was] a person who works well. Then I decided, I said no. "Thank you anyways for the offering",*

[22] In the Argentinean context, "negro" (black) is a term that refers in a derogatory way to the urban working class or the underserving poor. For more on the origins of this term, see James (1988).

I said "Because it is much more money, but I don't know… I have another ideology. For me and my family. And I want to continue learning, I want to continue studying, and want to continue doing other things, it is not just making more money" (Gloria, interviewed 06/14/2012)

A hard core remains. Those of us made of iron remain. And those who are the hard core, we have the same strength that we had in the past, to do those big occupations we used to do. We can still do it, and we do it. Last year we occupied the Electoral Court at La Plata. And we made a hunger strike for a week. I mean, we took the court seat, and they did not arrest us. The other day we almost occupied the Supreme Court, and then, since the justices met with us there we did not need to take it. (Armando, Interviewed 7/20/2011)

Finally, piquetero organizations not only have strengthened their inner circle of committed activists, but they have also accumulated a great deal of resources and know-how in the last fifteen years, which allows them to embark in broader types of projects and be more resilient to hard times. When I asked the leader of a small moderate organization about what changes had happened in his group, he told me that:

Compared to the end of 2001, this feels like Europe. Let me tell you, I am talking to you now and I am figuring out how I can buy more computers [for a classroom]. Back then I used to go house by house asking for rice, in solidarity,

because if we gathered ten kilos of rice and made a big stew for all, the big pot fed more than if everyone ate rice separately, at their homes (Interviewed on 07/28/2011)

This accumulation of resources also took place for those organizations opposed to the government. When I asked Priscila about the changes in the group she joined more than ten years ago, she pointed to a long list of material improvements:

The organization progresses because we did not have a roof where we make the assemblies, and now it has a roof. And they are doing a lot of things for the neighborhood. The health post is being expanded, there are more doctors, we have an ambulance, we used to not have that. In my opinion, [the organization's leaders] deal with a lot of things, they struggle to show how it has to grow. And I think it grew. There used to not be anything, now there are sewing machines, computers, chairs… we have lots of chairs, in the past there used to be nothing! (Interviewed 05/19/2014)

Organizations not only have managed to keep the resources accumulated over the years: in many occasions they are able to expand their presence at the local level. Alma, a neighborhood coordinator in an anti-government group, measured the growth in her area in terms of the different workfare plans she obtained, and proudly

described how she had to rent a bigger place to accommodate the increased membership that followed:

> *It been a year since we are here, at first we had 23 fellows, 13 were in the* Cooperativa*, the rest were in* Proyecto*, and then four or five were in the* PTA*, and there was no one else. In total we were 23 fellows, we were no one, we were nothing. Then we began to grow, our place became too small, we began recruiting people, opening new neighborhoods, and well, we reached the point in which there was no room for anyone* (interviewed 05/22/2014)

In sum, while the years after 2002 were certainly challenging for the movement, most groups are still active, and their inner core is thriving. Thus, asking ourselves why the movement declined is probably misguided, due to the significant amount of evidence that belies such an outcome. The remarkable resilience of piquetero groups is a much more relevant and accurate question.

Political opportunities since 2003

Many scholars argue that the post-2003 context was detrimental to the kind of grassroots movements that developed during the crisis, including the piqueteros (Svampa 2005 and 2008; Epstein 2006 and 2009; Torres 2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Battistini 2007; Pereyra 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Gomez 2009). Firstly, the years

after 2003 showed a vigorous reconstitution of the political system that had been affected by the crisis (Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008). That is, the capacity of representative institutions to provide governance at the national, provincial, and local level improved significantly. After years of chronic fiscal deficit, economic recovery led to a surplus in the budget and an increase in the reserves of the treasury. Consequently, government-run assistance networks became more extended and generous, which together with the expansion of labor opportunities (even with high levels of precariousness) reduced the centrality of piquetero groups for the survival of many families. In addition, these years witnessed a growth in the legitimacy of the system, as well as in the public confidence in the capacity of the government to solve the problems of the country (UTDT 2011).

Secondly, the post-crisis context witnessed a decrease in public support for the movement (Svampa 2005 and 2008; Massetti 2009). Although the influence of the media in this process might be overstated, it is nevertheless clear that shortly after 2002 the sympathy of middle-class Argentineans towards the movement began to erode rapidly, giving way to a strong demand for the return to "normal times" (Svampa 2008). The use of road blocks by poor people was particularly criticized by a public discourse that opposed "the right to protest" to "the right to transit" (Massetti 2009).

Finally, many of the coalitions that had emerged within the movement collapsed. This caused increasing difficulties to coordinate actions and reduced the influence of many organizations beyond the local level. The ability of the Kirchner administrations to

create a coalition of forces behind a political project that distanced itself from previous presidencies deprived the piquetero movement of the equation government=antagonist that had prevailed until then. Consequently, divisions on how to relate to the national administration emerged within the movement, as when the two largest organizations (the FTV and the CCC) terminated their previous alliance. In addition, splits took place even among moderate and hard-line groups. For instance, the Anibal Veron Coalition, an alliance of piquetero organizations which was very active during the crisis, experienced successive separations due to strategic and ideological differences (Torres 2006; Burkart and Vazquez 2008).

In sum, the post-2003 context was characterized by economic recovery, a reconstitution of political elites, improving state capabilities, and changes in public opinion regarding popular protest. As a result, all piquetero organizations were faced with a challenging context that forced them to adapt their strategies and alliances. The decrease in overall support for roadblocks, as well as dwindling memberships, led many organizations to rely less on disruptive collective action. In addition, the increased legitimacy of the electoral system (manifested in high voter turnout after record-low levels in 2001) encouraged most organizations to participate in elections:

> *When all this issue of the piquetero movement began around 2001, the great way of struggling was blocking roads. Hence, we also blocked roads, and streets, and bridges, and all the rest. Then we realized, around 2003, 2004, 2005 that that*

method was unpopular. Why? Because the buses with people going to work could not pass. The car drivers could not pass, and most of them were going to work […] So we decided not to block roads anymore, unless they forced us. Now, every time we march down an avenue, or a road, we always leave one lane open, so traffic can pass (Carlos, interviewed 07/20/2011)

I think we went through a lot of stages, and that kept us alive. That being said, after 2001-2003 we began to see that the solutions had to be through participating in elections, because society sees it that way. Therefore we began to create a political branch, so we can represent society with the different figures from our organization (Carlos, Interviewed 07/20/2011)

However, this context has not been entirely negative for social mobilization, for two reasons. In the short term, the political scenario opened opportunities for grassroots organizations, as a new national administration sought to incorporate them into its coalition of support. In the long term, social policy reforms enacted since the 1990s open the possibility for civil society groups (including piquetero organizations of all ideologies) to administer social assistance and other state resources.

The short term political context benefitted those organizations that allied themselves with the government. Similarly to what happened in other countries in the region, the Kirchner administrations, which came to power in 2003 with only 22.2% of

the vote, sought to incorporate piquetero organizations to their coalition of support (Escude 2009; Boyanovsky Bazan 2010; Etchemendy and Garay 2011; Perelmiter 2012). The need for the government to obtain and maintain the allegiance of these groups generated several openings for grassroots organizations who had been mobilized for years in their communities. The government offered resources to sustain their activities:

> *In 2004 the minister of social welfare came here, and proposed us to join what they were doing in the ministry. So, the things we did for free, now we could do them from inside the state. The alphabetization program, everything, from the state* (Mario, Interviewed 07/28/2011)

Members of piquetero groups were also offered high-level official positions in state dependencies, and many obtained seats in legislative bodies:

> *We gained recognition from other sectors, and possibilities, for example we are part of the Land Commission, which depends of the Chief of Cabinet of Ministries. That is not a small thing, because we deal with many problems, and in a way many problems with access to land are solved. We have a state representative, who is the president of the Land Commission of the Province. And many other fellows who hold political offices. I mean, we used to have nothing. So there is like an accumulation* (Graciela, Interviewed 07/20/2011)

Finally, pro-government organizations received substantial funds from the management of workfare positions, as well as for construction, sanitation and other infrastructure projects:

> *I don't know how time flew, suddenly, from a moment to the other [the organization] grew so much, it is impressive. It feels like it was yesterday that we started with marches and now we have a lot… We built a neighborhood! It grew a lot, compared to what it used to be, it grew a whole lot* (Amanda, Interviewed 10/06/2014)

Organizations like Mario's, Graciela's and Amanda's found state support for activities they had struggled to maintain over the years. Moreover, this support came a government that (at least rhetorically) supported many of their ideas, and in a regional context where several Latin American countries elected left-leaning presidents. Therefore, while it is clear that the government tried to benefit some organizations over others, the picture of an official strategy of dividing and weakening the piquetero movement (See Svampa 2005 and 2008; Perez, Pereyra and Schuster 2008; Delamata 2009) seems to be overly simplistic. In fact, the tactic followed by the Kirchner administrations seems to be one of supporting grassroots mobilization by diverting substantial resources toward already sympathetic groups. The ideology and past experiences of members and leaders of pro-government piquetero organizations belies

their characterization as sellouts. Their points of view did not change significantly after their inclusion in the official coalition:

> *I have been a political activist since 1972. Always, the axis of my politics was to oppose the government. Always. With the passage of years, what was the best tactic to denounce the government, to confront the government, to mobilize against the government. Today things are more complicated. There are times in which we want to demonstrate against some policy and it is politically incorrect to do so. That generates other kinds of contradictions, forces us to identify which are the main conflicts, which for us is empire versus nation, oligarchs versus the people. It put our politics in order.* (Osvaldo, Interviewed 8/9/2011)

Moreover, even organizations that did not support the government still benefitted from state resources. To a great extent, this was due to the continued negotiation power of disruptive collective action and the potential political cost of repression, which led authorities at different levels to use workfare plans and foodstuffs as a bargaining token to defuse demonstrations and blockades. However, this outcome also stems from long-term transformations in the management of social policy, in which state agencies at the national, provincial and local level delegated a significant portion of the management of social policies to grassroots organizations (regardless of their ideology). Starting in the 1990s, social policies in Argentina and other parts of Latin America moved from a universalistic logic to a more targeted one, in which the state relinquished control over

certain areas of social policy (See Lo Vuolo *et al* 2004; Barrientos and Santibañez 2009). This "focalized" nature of government intervention allowed piquetero organizations, regardless of their ideology, to become distributors of assistance, which provided a source of organizational resources and a way to recruit members (Garay 2007; Manzano 2013).

In other words, the movement and the state entered a symbiotic relation that remained in place after the crisis. While the latter was able to delegate the responsibility for the implementation of social policies into other actors, the former acquired resources necessary for their functioning. Given the context of extreme poverty in which they are inserted, piquetero groups cannot obtain the funds and assets they need to function from their members or other community institutions. Quite the opposite, members usually need to receive some sort of material support from the movement in order to sustain their full-time involvement. Thus, the resources needed to maintain any instance of organized collective action in these poverty-stricken neighborhoods have to come from other sources. Instead, different state programs provide the goods and money needed to support mobilization, through a constant process of negotiation between activists and the authorities (See Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Quiros 2011). This tense yet mutually beneficial relation is acknowledged by activists. Valentina is a member of the administration team of an anti-government organization, in charge of the paperwork for the thousands of workfare plans the group

manages. Even though her organization is at odds with the local government, she constantly meets with officials to ensure a smooth application of social programs:

> *You know, in the past if a fellow was not paid, we all blocked the road to make sure he was paid. Instead, now it is another political moment, now you negotiate, a fellow is in trouble and you go directly to the official with a claim. And since we have political deals, then our fellow gets paid again. It is not necessary that we all go. I go there, take the forms, make the claim and leave. That is my work nowadays* (Interviewed 02/14/2014)

Thus, while piquetero organizations allied to the government received more resources, opposition groups also managed to receive some degree of state support. Combined with their alliances with other political actors (such as unions, opposition parties and NGOs), piquetero organizations that were not favored in the distribution of resources still received a great deal of public funds and resources, that allowed them to remain active. As Julieta Quiros (2011) demonstrates, roadblocks nowadays serve more as a way to promote dialogue with the authorities than to disrupt it. Taking to the streets serves as a way to demand that officials meet with organizations regardless of ideology, and that they respect the compromises they made in previous meetings:

The state is much more present today. From an absent state in the 90s, we have a state more and more present. With delays, with problems, with bureaucracies, with slowness. Sometimes you need to burn some tires in front of some office to make them listen to you, or you have to call and say "what do you want, that I take a thousand guys and sit there until you come out so you listen to us?" (Osvaldo, Interviewed 8/9/2011)

*We make political deals that, in truth, the only way to make sure they fulfill them is that we take the streets. So far now it has worked that way. Like 10 days ago, we made a deal with the person that defines things in lieu of the mayor, and we made deals that they still have not respected (*Ines, Interviewed 6/1/2012)

You see, in reality nothing happens by chance. When you are involved in the struggle, in politics… you meet, you curse at others, but then you meet them for coffee. They tell you, for instance, "you know that in such and such district, the government gave the mayor money to set up cooperatives"… why do they get it and not us? Then we go and fight for that. We go to the Municipality, we discuss, we discuss. We go to the Ministry of labor, the palace of government, the ministry of planning. Sometimes we even occupy it. We discuss, we discuss, they tell us "either you leave, or we'll beat the shit out of you", we say "Well, we need jobs", and so on, until we finally obtain it (Alejandro, interviewed 2/26/2014)

In sum, state authorities and piquetero groups have a complex yet relatively stable relation, especially at the local level, where the interests of both actors frequently align. Despite occasional disagreements and ideological differences, over the years officials and activists have developed a set of common expectations about the management of social assistance that holds true even in districts with a tradition of conflict between both actors. For instance, take Julia, who frequently receives logistical support from the mayor she formally opposes (in the form of buses to take people to events):

> *The mayor knows what I am doing. And when I ask for buses that I need, sometimes he helps me. Everyone knows that, he helps me. I have no problem. My doors are open. Because he knows that at one moment we went with our leader to the municipality and took it, and got for them the* Trabajar *program, they did not have that.* (Interviewed on 7/13/2011)

In Julia's case, the mayor benefitted from the occupation of his own building, because that forced higher levels of government to send resources to the district (in the form of positions in a workfare program). A similar situation took place in many districts during the years leading to the 2001-2002 crisis, when local administrations treated blockades as an opportunity to pressure the provincial and national administrations (See Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Manzano 2013). Another example is Gustavo's organization, which has a congenial relation with the municipality despite many episodes of hostility:

The municipality respects us, because they know we know how to defend what its ours. They don't want us to mess with them (Interviewed on 7/16/2011)

In this case, the relation between piqueteros and the authorities is sustained by the certainty of retaliation if any of them cheats the other. State officials know that the group efficiently delivers educational services to hundreds of people in the area, and that its members will "defend what is ours" if deals are not respected. Hence, despite their distrust of each other, the relation stands, to the mutual benefit of both parties: the group receives an amount of resources, and the district extends its services at little cost.

Piquetero movements as problem-solving networks

The complex relation between piquetero organizations and other actors in the post-2003 context suggests the need to reexamine the movement's origins and development. While in many aspects the *piqueteros* were an innovative experience of collective action (see for instance Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata 2004; Svampa 2005, 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008), they have also drawn heavily on previous traditions in Argentina's popular politics. Research suggest that most piquetero organizations developed as networks of semiautonomous local groups more or less well coordinated by a central leadership (Merklen 2005; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Grimson *et al* 2009; Manzano 2013). These groups and their members had extensive links to other instances of

community life, such as unions (Benclowicz 2011; Battezzati 2012), religious institutions (Vommaro 2008) land occupations (Merklen 2005) and radical left political parties (Natalucci 2008). These connections provided resources, know-how and networks that were essential for the movement's emergence:

> *It was around 94 that after lots of discussion, lots of national meetings, we created this organization. Which had two big components of the labor movement, containing workers and retirees […]. Until the late 90s debacle came, with an army of unemployed people. So we struggled a lot, our idea was that the unemployed should not become, as they said, a new social subject. We thought that each union should support those who lost their jobs. But obviously that did not happen. […] Thus many political sectors, not just us, began to organize their contingent of unemployed workers.* (Diego, interviewed 6/9/2012)

> *The so-called social movements in Argentina, the piquetero movement, all that comes from a previous formation. This whole thing begins formally in the year 98, but in 97 there was already an assembly, and in 95 they were talking about doing something to improve the area of habitat, and others. […] Notice that in 98, 99, when the first roadblocks were made, our organization did not start them, it joined later to that methodology, and backed the demands of those fellows* (Arnaldo, Interviewed 8/9/2011)

Moreover, from the beginning piquetero organizations have been embedded in the political culture prevalent in Argentinean working class neighborhoods, built around relations of reciprocity and trust between patrons and their constituencies (Auyero 2001; Levitsky 2003; Cerutti and Grimson 2005). Despite their competition for resources with other networks of social assistance, the *piqueteros* movement could not avoid the set of norms, dispositions and expectations that have characterized popular politics in Argentina for the last few decades.

In other words, since their emergence piquetero groups have functioned in a similar way as other instances of political life in their neighborhoods (Quiros 2011; Lapegna 2013). The influx of leaders knowledgeable in community activism, a flexible internal structure, and an effective repertoire of contention allowed piquetero organizations to function as effective problem-solving networks (Lommintz 1975; Gonzalez de la Rocha 1986), to which poor Argentineans recurred when faced with the deprivations caused by unemployment. In sum, it was their resonance with local political traditions, and not their break from them, what allowed the piqueteros to expand:

> *People see our place like a community service center, where they can go and say "Hey, I have this problem". It is not that we feel we are anyone's saviors, it is more like "ok, come in, let us organize and look for a solution". And I think that tends to become like a family, because then people come to drink mate, see what's going on, what problems, brings someone else's problems. And we move forward*

with that. Why? Because we are just another neighbor. We all live in the neighborhood, I live in the neighborhood, with my dad, I have a room on top of his house. I live the same way others live. We are not the paladins of justice that live downtown and come to the neighborhood… People feel more represented by people who are like them (Carlos, Interviewed 07/20/2011)

I like helping people get a plan. Or give them foodstuffs. Or tell them "well, you've got a problem, let me go with you to do the paperwork" or "you've got to do it this way". Because there are people who are in a worse situation than me. For instance, thanks to God my house does not flood, but there are people who do: "well, let's go to the municipality to talk". Since they already know our organization, then they meet with you faster, you know? (Giugliana, interviewed 02/26/2014)

The importance of problem-solving networks varies with their context. As the economy in Argentina began to recover in 2003, employment opportunities became more available. In addition, alternative networks such as traditional party politics, state offices, charitable organizations and religious institutions obtained more resources. This scenario severely affected the number of people mobilized through piquetero organizations.

2001 was a terribly volatile time. And that extended for many years. Then a relative economic stability, product of the high price of commodities,

> *stabilized things a bit, not because all structural necessities were resolved, but because there was the chance, as we say, of making it a bit, the person who had no job now could get some odd job, some precarious job, in a country with 40% of informality, a few were more lucky and got a regular job, with which they could solve their most urgent needs* (Patricio, interviewed on 07/21/2011)

That being said, this development did not significantly affect the networks of committed activists that constitute the core structure of most organizations. In other words, while the post-2003 context affected the capacity of piquetero groups to attract and keep short-term participants, most organizations accumulated the resources and expertise necessary to cement a core structure of committed activists, by offering them the resources necessary to sustain themselves, even if barely making it.

The strengthening of these networks of activists at the core of most piquetero organizations means that they can serve as the source for new experiences of mobilization in the future. In other words, just as left-wing parties, human rights groups, and unions served as abeyance structures during the emergence of the piquetero movement, the same process might repeat itself in the future, when conditions become favorable again for a substantial increase in street protest, such as an expansion in unemployment, economic stagnation or increased state repression.

Discussion and conclusion

Starting three decades ago, Latin America has experienced an unprecedented period of democratization. Most countries in the region managed to maintain governments elected by citizens, high levels of civic freedoms, and institutional mechanisms for transfer of power that held even in times of turmoil. However, this period has also coincided with an overall retrenchment of the welfare state and an expansion in unemployment and informality, all related to the extensive neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1970s by both authoritarian and democratic administrations. Most countries suffered significant increases in inequality, marginality and interpersonal violence. Hence, the last decades combine a great expansion of political liberties with the undermining of social and economic rights. This scenario has promoted the development of new experiences of collective action. Faced with a combination of growing opportunities for dissent and the weakening of their means of livelihood, millions of Latin Americans have organized to demand access to a decent standard of living.

In this article I explored the recent trajectory of one of these experiences: the piqueteros. I have argued that in contrary to the views of many scholars, the movement has not declined since 2003, but instead has strengthened its core structures. In addition, I contend that the post-2003 political context was much more favorable to collective action than previously thought. In order to back my claims, I put forward a new

conceptualization of the piquetero movement, emphasizing its connection with other local experiences of political life. My findings raise three points for discussion.

First, this study highlights the importance of analyzing social movements after they leave the headlines. If the emergence of cycles of contention depends on existing networks of individuals and groups who remain active when the rest of society seems quiescent, then focusing only on the most visible moments of these cycles will lead to inaccurate interpretations about the nature of social protest. Mobilization might peak and subside. Streets might witness periods of turmoil and calm. But the committed activists at the core of movements persevere at all times. While databases of contentious events can help us determine when protest cycles begin and end, the fate of individual organizations and activists is much more complex. Movements leave traces, and many participants remain involved even in times of acquiescence (Rupp and Taylor 1987; Melucci 1989; Downton and Wehr 1997; Nepstad 2004; Corrigall-Brown 2011). In short, collective action never vanishes entirely. The frequency with which large-scale protests emerge when scholars least expect it is not only a sign of their complex nature, but also (and perhaps primarily) of the literature's unwillingness to follow activists after they cease to be eminently visible. Studies that have done so (See Taylor and Rupp 1987; McAdam 1988; Andrews 1991) have been particular prolific in improving our understanding of lifetimes of political participation.

Second, this paper supports the need to "put social movements in their place" (McAdam and Boudet 2012). Only by placing the piqueteros in a particular historical and social context we can have an idea of where they came from and where they are going. The novel aspects of a movement should not distract us from its continuities with previous experiences of collective action. In particular, the trajectory of piquetero organizations has been influenced to a great degree by the legacy of past instances of grassroots development, and by their immersion in a particular political culture.

Third, observers frequently talk about social movements in different Latin American countries as monolithic. However, this is rarely true. In my specific case, not only the piquetero movement includes a great variety of groups and ideologies, but the organizations themselves are far less internally uniform than perceived. More research is needed on the diverse experiences of mobilization in the region, because they have proven themselves essential to the maintenance and deepening of democratic rule. Understanding their nature, and what influences their strength, is not just an academic question. The future of Latin American democracies, how inclusive, functional and stable they can be, depends on both the agendas and strength of social movements in the region.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

My dissertation has explored the experiences of activists and organizations in the unemployed worker's movement. My goal has been to understand why some participants develop a strong commitment to their groups while others withdraw, how their practices while mobilized relate to other aspects of their lives, and the ways in which these dynamics affect the overall trajectory of the movement. I contend that addressing these empirical issues has important implications for both social movement theory and for the future of democracy in Latin America.

The overarching question throughout my project has been the persistence of collective action, that is, the mechanisms that sustain mobilization when the conditions that promoted its emergence change. When most people leave the streets, demands for change leave the public agenda, and turmoil gives way to more settled times, some individuals and their organizations remain active nevertheless. Such perseverance is crucial, because it can contribute to future instances of mobilization. Understanding what drives these individuals requires focusing on four understudied aspects of collective action: It resilience, its diversity, its practice, and its ordinariness.

By resilience I mean that we have a significant amount of knowledge on the factors that support the emergence and development of political participation, but we don't know much about the reasons why some people remain involved despite substantial obstacles. In addition, we fail to fully understand the processes that influence social

mobilization after peaks of contention. A central component of this problem is that the vast majority of knowledge about social movement participation comes from studies that focus on the recruitment phase. As a result, we know very little about how individuals become committed activists, and why some persist when others do not. We have an idea of the conditions that make such an outcome more likely, but we know far less about the process by which those factors interact with the experience of mobilization to determine the trajectories of people following recruitment.

In the specific case of the piqueteros, the empirical puzzle of why people with similar profiles follow such different trajectories (some becoming dedicated activists, others dropping after a while) is explained neither by their personal characteristics or their experiences in the movement, but by the interaction between both. Participation becomes an end in itself because it constitutes a way to solve important deficits in people's lives, by offering a series of rewards that cannot be obtained somewhere else.

Diversity refers to the acknowledgement of the imperfect association between personal characteristics and the various experiences of people in a social movement. Individuals with similar backgrounds and profiles participate very differently, and the features that conduce to activism in one person do not in another. In other words, scholars have been able to identify a great number of factors associated with political participation, but the actual connection at the individual level is usually poor. The

development of activism is a complex, diverse and contingent process, the outcome of which is not determined from the beginning by the personal features of participants.

In my case of study, the profile of most recruits to piquetero organizations hardly predicts long-term involvement. Most of them were destitute, cynical and disempowered individuals who join the movement as an attempt to access resources. Given their situation, it is not surprising that many of them leave after a while. However, others stay, and gradually develop a strong attachment to the group. Nothing in their past histories predestinates them to become "iron fellows", nor they have "the right stuff" for becoming activists. Their personal characteristics predispose them to enjoy some aspects of the movement, but the activation of such potential gratification depends on their activities while mobilized.

The last point takes me to the third aspect of collective action that I want to emphasize. Researchers have conceptualized activism as the result of ideological conversion. However, they have paid less attention to the fact that collective action is, first and foremost, a practice. That is, individuals do certain things and engage in particular behaviors when they participate in a social movement. Thus, whether these activities are enjoyable or meaningful is crucial to people's commitment to the organization that makes them possible. While we know how individuals gradually concur with a set of ideas, we understand much less about how people come to enjoy the practices associated with political participation.

With regards to the piqueteros, I have shown how the development of commitment does not require that a person agrees with his or her organization's views. Instead, for many activists long-term participation develops through a process of "learning to enjoy" their routines while mobilized. Activism offers a way to defend a battered sense of self-worth by allowing participants to actualize dispositions developed in vanishing fields of life. In particular, members learn to reenact, develop and protect the routines associated with a respectable working class ethos that is rendered less and less common due to the elimination of blue collar jobs.

Finally, scholars need to focus not only on the novelty of collective action for participants, but also on its ordinariness, that is, its resonance with other aspects of a person's life and history. As Jocelyn Viterna (2013) shows, becoming an activist is more than agreeing with a set of ideas. It is also a process of connecting one's identity with a collective struggle. However, activism influences a person's sense of self not only by providing new forms of identification, but also by upholding an already existing valued identity.

As the previous chapters demonstrate, some of the most committed activists in my study had very negative views on the movement at the moment of recruitment. However, with time they began to see their participation as a way to engage in a lifestyle that they see as wholesome. Being a piquetero, in short, becomes being a good worker, and thus

provides a reassuring sense of righteousness and order in a context of socioeconomic decline.

Attention to these four aspects suggests that the literature on social movement needs to escape its own limits and engage a broader debate on the sources of social action. If the key to commitment lies in the gratification a person obtains from participating in contention, then we need to study under which circumstances does participation in a social activity become self-promoting. Insights from other fields of sociology can be very illuminating in dealing with this question. In particular, studies that challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about certain activities provide ideas for understanding why, against all odds, some people in Argentina's poorest neighborhoods devote significant time and resources to participate in a movement (see for instance Katz 1988; Bourgois 1995; Wood 2003; Wacquant 2004; Desmond 2007; Benzecry 2011). These works all point to the same basic question: What do people obtain from participating in a social activity? In other words, any attempt to answer my questions will benefit from what Dianne Vaughan (2004) calls "analogical theorizing": the development of concepts by comparing phenomena that apply to diverse cases.

The persistence of collective action is not only a theoretically interesting topic: it is also an actual issue in world politics. In particular, understanding the strength of grassroots activism is essential for assessing the challenges and potential of the young Latin American democracies. The unprecedented period of political liberalization that

began to unfold during the 1980s coincided with a retrenchment of welfare and social rights. This coincidence has promoted the emergence of vast waves of contention. Moreover, during the last decade political elites in different countries have sought to incorporate grassroots organizations into their coalitions. Thus, not only have social movements become more prevalent in the streets, but their influence in the political arena as a whole has increased. However, the connection between many of these experiences and other instances of civic engagement remain understudied.

The piqueteros are a prime example of how the combination of innovative protests with the use of traditional repertoires gives movements in Latin America much of their vitality. However, the literature on this case suffers from a significant shortcoming. Some scholars have focused on variables at the organizational level, making analyses that relate to the movement as a whole but offer almost no insight about the lives of rank-and-file activists (See for instance Svampa and Pereyra 2003; Delamata, 2004; Svampa 2005 and 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008). Others have conducted detailed ethnographic studies of a small group of members, which provide very rich data about their experiences but are hardly generalizable beyond their case (See for instance Auyero 2003; Quiros 2006 and 2011). I have tried to combine the strengths of both approaches to create a study that deals with a (surprisingly) still scarcely explored question: who are the men and women that participate in the piquetero movement? In which ways do their biographies, stories, experiences and struggles differ from other people in their communities?

In the end, the basic question throughout my dissertation research has been: what makes a militant? What turns people who are apathetic and disillusioned into enthusiastic stalwarts? Such is perhaps the most direct contribution of my work. Countless times during fieldwork my respondents said that their hardest task is to "get people to move", turn someone who "shows up looking for foodstuffs" into a person who is convinced of the organization's cause. I do not claim to be able to teach much about collective action to seasoned activists and policymakers, but research on movements like the piqueteros can inform public interventions to promote civic engagement. In contexts of growing inequality, any initiative that supports public life and community organization is very likely to have positive effects on the lives of marginalized populations.

Appendix A – An Ethnography of the Unemployed Workers Movement

Field research for this project took place in the summers of 2011, 2012, 2013, and for one year starting in December of 2013. The results were 1,170 single spaced pages of fieldnotes, as well as interviews with 153 current and former activists in eleven different piquetero organizations. Research took place in the Greater Buenos Aires area and in San Salvador de Jujuy (See illustration 1)

The central question my dissertation seeks to answer is the persistence of mobilization. Why do some people sustain their participation when others withdraw? How do social movements remain active after peaks of contention? Nevertheless, while the question itself remained the same throughout the entire project, the ways in which I addressed it changed as my research progressed. My original goal was to analyze what I saw as the decline of the movement after the economic collapse of 2001-2002. This topic had developed out of my dissatisfaction with the tendency of social movement theory to focus much more on the emergence of contention than on its sustainment or weakening. In addition, I wanted to understand how organizations in the movement had adapted to face their apparent demise.

However, as I immersed in the fieldwork, talking with activists and witnessing their work, it progressively dawned on me that the question was far more complex than I had anticipated. An interpretation of the post-2003 trajectory of the movement based on a

narrative of decline simply did not stand up to scrutiny. While it was clear that the membership and street presence of piquetero organizations had dwindled, this was only one aspect, the most visible one, of their situation. Fieldwork at the community level revealed a different story, one in which most groups had managed to sustain their core structures, had developed networks of committed activists, and were recognized as legitimate actors in the management of state resources. In sum, I was witnessing not a decline but a transformation, and in some aspects, a strengthening.

Hence, as I accumulated more and more data my main empirical puzzle became why most of these organizations were still active more than ten years after their last peak of contention. The key to answer this question laid in explaining the trajectories of activists. I realized that a crucial aspect of the post-2003 history of most piquetero groups was the cementing of core networks of committed members. However, this development seemed to challenge the explanations suggested by the literature on political participation. At the moment of joining, the profile of most of these members did not match the one that theoretically should lead to long-term involvement: most of them were destitute, with low levels of education and limited feelings of efficacy. Moreover, the vast majority had approached their organization not due to ideological affinity, but rather as a way to obtain resources needed for survival.

Illustration 1. Map of Argentina (fieldsites pointed)[23]

Understanding both the movement's trajectory since 2003 and how some of its members became long-term participants thus became two aspects of the same question, the answer to which required a focus on the relation between activism and its broader context. As a result, since 2012 my fieldwork centered more on the relation between piquetero groups and other experiences of collective life in their communities, as well as on the resonance between the personal histories of members and their practices while

[23] Source: Government of Argentina [www.argentina.gob.ar]. Accessed 2/29/2016

mobilized. In other words, I broadened my empirical focus, both at the individual and organizational level.

Epistemology

From the beginning, my project drew heavily on the principles of reflexive sociology (see Bourdieu 1988; Wacquant 1992). This epistemological stance became stronger with time, as my research focus shifted towards the interrelation between social action and its context. In particular, I have found Bourdieu's concept of habitus very useful in formulating and addressing my research question. For Bourdieu, every aspect of social life is the result of a "relation of true ontological complicity" (1988, p. 783) between the *field*, "a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power" (Wacquant 1992, p. 16) and the *habitus*, the embodiment of those relations "in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action" (*ibid*). The field-habitus relation allowed me to surpass the agency/structure dichotomy in explaining individual behavior:

> The habitus, being the product of the incorporation of objective necessity, of necessity turned into virtue, produces strategies which are objectively adjusted to the objective situation even though these strategies are neither the outcome of the explicit aiming at consciously pursued goals, nor the result of some mechanical determination by external causes (1988, p. 782).

In the specific case of the piqueteros, my research explored how the interaction between people's history and their experiences in a social movement leads them to appreciate participation as an end in itself. In other words, the interplay between biography and activism generates enduring dispositions that sustain involvement despite the existence of obstacles (what I term "resistance to quit").

Adopting a reflexive approach also implies that fieldwork cannot aim to be an "objective" recording of events. In other words, the very presence of the researcher influences the processes he or she studies. In my case, this situation was particularly salient with regards to three dimensions.

Firstly, my race, gender and class influence my interaction with participants. Some of my physical features (a tall, fair skinned young person) are markers of privilege that placed me in a position of authority from the beginning, something that was only reinforced by my educational background and gender. For example, one day in 2012 I was introduced to a group of women in a garment production project ran by a piquetero organization and funded by the national government. The women were having a break and chatting among themselves. However, as soon as I entered the room they hurried back to work. A few moments later they explained among laughter that they had thought I was a representative from "the ministry", that is, a state official in charge of checking their work.

Markers of privilege are a deeply ingrained component of social stratification, and thus their influence in my fieldwork was impossible to overcome entirely. However, the very consistency of my research, the fact that I always returned to the same organizations and shared the daily routines of their members, served to place me in a more horizontal relationship with them. I did not become a complete insider (as I will argue later, that was never my goal), but it was easier for my respondents to see me as an equal after repeatedly working, having meals and blocking roads with them. Returning to the sites over the years served at least to demonstrate to activists that even if my goals were different than theirs, the movement was as important to me as it was to them.

The second dimension is my work as a researcher. My status as a young sociologist from a foreign university (who needs to obtain information in order to get his PhD), affected my work. Not only it determined my priorities and shaped the way I conducted research, but it also placed me in a given position vis-a-vis my respondents. For instance, when I first met activists and told them who I was, a frequent reply was "oh, like the German/French/American/Italian that came here not long ago". That is, people in these organizations are used to scholars who come from developed countries and study them. As a result, I was automatically inserted from day one into a set of expectations about my work.

Even though I did not succeed completely (some people still confused me for an American, especially when they first knew me), over time I did manage to overcome some of the stereotypes associated with foreign scholars. The fact that I am Argentinean meant that I shared aspects of a common culture with my respondents. As a result, not only I knew about my country's history and politics, but I was also able to have conversations on other topics. For instance, my knowledge of local soccer clubs (mostly from little-known second and third division leagues) helped me connect with participants and show that I could talk about more than sociology. In addition, some aspects of my personal history intersected with those of my respondents. For example, my mother worked for decades as a kindergarten teacher in some of the same neighborhoods I did research on, and even though I never joined any political group, I have participated in movements closely associated with the piqueteros since I was a teenager. Coupled with the consistency of my fieldwork, these personal characteristics distanced me in part from my respondents' original preconceptions about my work.

The third dimension is what Loïc Wacquant calls the "intellectualist bias", the tendency to "see the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than concrete problems to be solved practically" (1992, p. 41). Events that I saw as interesting social phenomena were, for my respondents, just a portion of their lives. Indeed, as I have argued in previous chapters, it is the very commonplaceness of their practices in the movement what makes them appealing. However, this frequently caused a gap between me and my respondents with regards to what was important about their

lives. This difference was a challenging component in even my most fascinating interviews, some of which began with the interviewee apologizing for "not having anything interesting to say".

However, as the fieldwork progressed my focus on the practices of activists helped me bridge this gap (at least in part). In other words, my interviews centered on the life histories of respondents, without asking any interpretative questions until the very end. Of course, I welcomed their views and opinions, but my main goal was to reconstruct the personal history of each respondent, in his or her own terms. Therefore, I could count on a simple way to maintain interviews on track and gather relevant data, by following chronologically the life of each person, from their childhood to the present day. That is, one of my most common questions became variations of "and then what happened?". Even if the interviewee and I had different ideas about the most important aspects of their lives, asking these types of questions increased the chances that nothing was left unsaid.

Being reflexive about my own work also implied being open to myself about my goals. In particular, from the beginning I accepted that I was not engaged in activist or action research (Esterberg 2001, Ch. 7), although I drew on some aspects of it. My work has the potential to benefit the organizations and activists on which it is based, by providing them with useful information and generating materials for debate. In addition, I will make sure that my respondents have access to my findings, through offering

seminars and workshops to any interested organization. However, the main purpose of my study is not to empower my respondents, but to answer an empirical puzzle with theoretical implications. Empowerment is a side product (and I am taking steps to guarantee that it occurs) but not the reason why I am doing my work.

There are two further (and related) reasons why I do not claim to be doing action research. First, although I will share my findings with my respondents, I am not willing to relinquish much control over the production of that knowledge. As Esterberg (2001) indicates, action research implies sharing power and eroding the distinction between researcher and researched. But this is only possible if the main objective of the study is the empowerment of subjects, which is not my case. Second, this type of scholarly work is not exempt of problems. Studies in this tradition are based on a strong version of what Merton (1972) called "the insider doctrine", that is, the idea that "you have to be one to understand one" (p. 15). However, the commitment of an author to his or her subjects might lead to a voluntaristic analysis and the dismissal of evidence provided by outsiders. I believe such a study would not be useful to the organizations which it seeks to help. Quite the opposite, it can be used to block open discussion and promote dogmatism.

Methodology

Components

Empirical evidence for my dissertation is divided into three components. The first consists of interviews with current and former activists in eleven different organizations. The second is participant observation of the movement's activities over three years and half years. The third is complementary information in the form of databases of contentious events and a review of the extensive literature on the movement written by journalists, academics and activists.

Data from interviews and participant observation were collected through ethnographic fieldwork during the summers of 2011, 2012 and 2013, and for a year starting in December of 2013. For the most part it was located in several districts of the Greater Buenos Aires area, where the biggest and most influential unemployed workers organizations are based. In September of 2013 I travelled to San Salvador de Jujuy to conduct research on piquetero groups there, in order to broaden the experiences included in my study, include geographical variation in my sample, and lay the foundations for my next research project[24]. San Salvador de Jujuy was chosen because it differs in substantial aspects from Buenos Aires. The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires concentrates one third

[24] My future work will use the case of social movements in the province of Jujuy to analyze the ways in which grassroots organizations take on roles previously assumed by other social institutions and the state. Piquetero groups in Jujuy have successfully managed a whole array of social policies and infrastructure projects with public funds. While these policies have increased access to housing, health care and education services, local observers have also expressed concern about a potential lack of sustainability and transparency. Exploring the achievements, dilemmas and challenges of these experiences has important implications for other parts of Latin America, where grassroots organizations have expanded their influence on public policies during the last decades. This process generates opportunities for innovative forms of democratic governance, but also raises important challenges in terms of representation and accountability. The crucial question for the future of the fledging Latin American democracies is whether instances of collective action that emerged as a defensive reaction against neoliberalism can effectively assume governmental duties.

of the country's population, and includes the seats of both the national government and the two largest subnational units. In contrast, San Salvador de Jujuy is the capital of relatively small province. Despite these contrasts, both cities have strong piquetero organizations.

Fieldwork was divided into two phases. During the summers of 2011 and 2012 I familiarized myself with my object of study and developed contacts with nine different organizations in the Greater Buenos Aires area. I performed 39 individual and 12 group interviews with activists, for a total of 71 respondents. I also participated in different activities their organizations carried out, including meetings, special events, and demonstrations. I used this information to plan the second stage of my fieldwork, which took place during 2013 and 2014. As the research question developed, I performed longer interviews with current and former activists, focusing not only on their time in the movement, but also other aspects of their lives. Hence, my research at this stage included 93 life-history interviews (See Weiss 1994; Atkinson 2000) with current and former members of different piquetero organizations[25]. The goal was to understand the interrelation between biography and activism for the whole life of each respondent. Thus, interviews took an average of two hours and usually required multiple meetings. My purpose was to obtain a detailed description of the personal history of each subject, in his or her own terms. In particular, interviews sought to illuminate three aspects of the

[25] The total number of respondents was thus 153. I interviewed a total of 70 people during the summers of 2011 and 2012, and a total of 93 people during 2013-2014. The difference (153 total respondents, 163 interviews) is because I re-interviewed ten people I had already interviewed during the first phase of my fieldwork.

respondent's lives: (a) How did his or her background contribute to being recruited to a piquetero organization? (b) How did the experience of mobilization relate to other spheres of his or her life? (c) How did this connection influence their trajectories after recruitment?

In other words, I followed the advice of Jack Katz (2001 and 2002) of asking "How?" instead of "Why?" questions. I used interviews to carefully reconstruct the experiences of respondents before and after joining a piquetero organization, instead of asking interpretative questions. Given that I am Argentinean, activists were less likely to perceive me as a neutral observer, because in Argentina the social category of "piquetero" is strongly contested. Respondents know that most observers have strong opinions about them, and hence may have felt compelled to provide a "proper response" that obscures their experiences, perceptions and ideas. Only at the end of each interview did I ask a general question on the respondent's reasons for joining, staying in and (if applicable) leaving the movement.

The reason for interviewing participants and dropouts was straightforward: the best way to fully understand the mechanisms that cause a person to commit (or not) to collective action is to talk to those who stayed and those who left, and analyze the ways in which their experiences differ (for a similar methodology see Klandermans 1997; Passy and Giugni 2000; White 2010, Corrigall-Brown 2011). Contacting dropouts was more difficult than expected, but I was able to do fifteen life-history interviews with

former members of the movement. Furthermore, the extended period of fieldwork provided the advantage that I was able to interview the same individuals at different stages of their involvement in their organizations[26].

I recruited my respondents by asking people during participant observation if they wanted to be interviewed. If they said yes, we would set up a time and location to meet, at the discretion of the respondent. Most interviews took place in an organization's building, the respondent's house, or a public space or coffeehouse. In addition, I used snowball sampling to recruit dropouts and other activists who were not regularly present at the sites where I did research[27].

The second component of my fieldwork was participant observation of activities carried out by the different organizations I contacted. Some of them were public (demonstrations, community service events) and others were private (meetings,

[26] In particular, I interviewed three people before and after they left the movement, and talked with a few activists while they were in the process of disengaging.

[27] 58.2% of my respondents are women, 40.5% men, and 1.3% transgender. Their ages vary from the early 20s to the late 70s. Twenty of them live in San Salvador de Jujuy, and the rest in seven districts of the Greater Buenos Aires and the city of Buenos Aires itself (some of the interviewees lived in a district different than the one their organization was located on.) The majority was born in Argentina, while thirteen are from neighboring countries. Their overall ideological stances range from conservative nationalism to left-wing anarchism. Their time in the movement varies from a few months to more than fifteen years. Appendix II includes the full list of in-depth interviews participants, along with a number of their personal characteristics. To protect the anonymity of respondents, I changed their names for pseudonyms and transformed their specific age into an ordinal category.

assemblies, negotiations). I also visited the location[28] of different organizations on regular days, when "nothing special happens".

My involvement in the daily life of organizations helped generate trust with my respondents and get to know people. It was also a crucial source of evidence in two specific ways. First, it was the context for valuable informal conversations. I came to realize, especially after the first round of fieldwork, that in many cases skipping the formality of an in-depth interview and keeping the recorder off was a great way to learn about the experiences of my respondents. It happened quite often that in the middle of an event, different activists started to tell me about their history in the movement, sometimes even without me asking anything. The disadvantage was obvious: I had to wait until later to write down what the person had told me. But the benefits were also important. Exchanges felt more natural than many formal interviews and the lack of defined format made it easier for other people to join the conversation.

Second, participant observation was essential in allowing me to witness the practices of people in the movement. While interviews were a window into the personal history and perceptions of each activist, participant observation gave me an opportunity

[28] The word used by members of the movement to refer to the places where the meet is *local* (plural: *locales*). Throughout the dissertation I have avoided using this term. Instead, I have used "locale", "center", "office", "location" and "building" interchangeably, since each of these words captures aspects of the term. A *local* is a building or room, usually improvised, where social movements and political parties in Argentina carry out their activities. They have different purposes: storage of foodstuffs, tools and banners, shelter and soup kitchens, education centers, space for meetings and events. Many of them are located in the house of a local referent, others are occupied buildings, and a few are rented or owned by the organization. Generally, for each neighborhood in which an organization is present, there is a *local*.

to learn about what people do every day in the movement, and how those practices connect with other aspects of their lives, past and present. Therefore, I made sure to observe not only special events and demonstrations, but also the daily routines of activists, those unremarkable tasks that constitute the majority of their time in the movement.

My interviews and observations thus complemented each other and took place at the same time. A typical day in my fieldwork was the following: early in the morning I travelled to a given neighborhood of the Greater Buenos Aires. A few days before, I had called one of my contacts in a specific organization and asked if I could visit. Sometimes I had been invited to a special activity in advance, so I just called to confirm. I arrived at the place and spent time there. I tried not to be "a fly on the wall", but instead to participate in whatever was going on, either regular activities (moving foodstuffs, working on the neighborhood, cooking) or special events (marching, blocking a road, camping during a protest). When there was an opportunity to do a formal interview (such as when we killed time drinking mate, or I when was introduced to someone), I did so. Otherwise, I would just stay there, watching and talking to people. I returned home in the late afternoon and wrote fieldnotes for several hours. There were a few days that I set aside to do a formal interview with specific people that were particularly interesting for some reason. For instance, a group of teachers in a program implemented by one organization, legislators and unionists associated with piquetero groups, and former activists.

In sum, over a period of three and a half years I accumulated a vast amount of evidence: 1,170 single-spaced pages of notes, as well as recorded interviews with 153 current and former activists from eleven different piquetero organizations. Fieldnotes and transcripts were analyzed using open and focused coding (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). I first read over them in detail, writing down trends and issues that emerged. I used this list to create a more specific set of codes, which then served as a guideline to repeat the systematic line-by-line analysis of the data. As a result, I was able to identify both commonalities and variations in the experiences of people in my study.

I complemented the data from interviews and participant observation with a thorough use of databases of contention and secondary sources. I used the former to explore variations in the movement's trajectory since its beginning. The first database[29] was created by the Study Group on Social Protest and Collective Action (GEPSAC) of the University of Buenos Aires. It includes all protests registered between 1983 and 2006 in Argentina's two most widely read newspapers, *Clarin* and *La Nacion*, classified by variables such as the actors involved, the repertoire used, and the demands expressed . It provides a unique perspective on the importance (compared to other experiences of mobilization) of piquetero organizations during the key years that surrounded Argentina's 2001-2002 economic collapse. The second database[30] was created by Nueva Mayoria, a think tank located in Buenos Aires. It registers all roadblocks that took place in Argentina

[29] See Schuster *et al* (2006)
[30] See Nueva Mayoria (2008 and 2009)

between 1997 and 2007. I chose this decade as it marks the point where this repertoire was closely associated with the piquetero movement, hence providing an approximate idea of the extent of its presence in the streets.

Finally, I contextualized my arguments by using the extensive literature on the piquetero movement, written both by academics (Massetti 2004; Svampa 2005 and 2008; Epstein 2006 and 2009; Torres 2006; Garay 2007; Wolff 2007; Battistini 2007; Pereyra 2008; Pereyra, Perez and Schuster 2008; Gomez 2009; Ferraudi Curto 2009; Frederic 2009; Quiros 2006 and 2011; Manzano, 2013), Journalists (Schneider Mansilla and Conti 2003; Young 2008; Russo 2010; Boyanovski Bazam 2010) and activists (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD Solano 2002; Kohan 2002, Mazzeo 2004; Oviedo 2004; Flores 2005 and 2007; Gomez and Massetti 2009). The combination of different cases, methodologies, agendas and arguments provide a nuanced account of the history of the movement.

Methodological issues

Sample selection

The piquetero movement consists of dozens of organizations. How did I choose which ones to focus on? On the one hand, I wanted to know the experiences of as many groups as possible. But on the other, I also wanted to have time to study each in detail.

Consequently, I decided to spend the first two stages of my fieldwork exploring the diversity of piquetero organizations, and focus the more advanced stages on a subset of these groups. In other words, I used the information collected in my preliminary fieldwork as a "data outcropping" (Luker 2008) to refine my research question and know where I had a higher chance of success in searching for the answers.

Consequently, I concluded that the ideal number of organizations at the initial stage (2011-2012), given the time I had and my goals, was eight. The criteria for choosing them were:

(i) Geographical location: the Greater Buenos Aires area, where most organizations are based, is divided into 24 districts, with diverse social and political conditions. I decided I would focus on groups based on different districts. I worked on five of them, plus the city of Buenos Aires itself[31].

(ii) Ideology: the most important division that has separated organizations in the last decade is whether they are supporters or opponents of the coalition that controlled the national government during the presidencies of Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-2015). Therefore, I contacted groups on both sides of this dispute. I also included organizations that switched sides.

[31] In addition, many activists live in a different district than the one where they participate, which allowed me to learn about the experiences of people from an even more diverse set of municipalities.

(iii) Trajectory: I included organizations with different trajectories, from some that sustained a large portion of their membership to others that were reduced to little more than their most committed members.

In addition to these guidelines, I followed the advice of always taking advantage of a research opportunity. This happened when I first contacted different leaders from an organization in my sample. One of them answered that his faction had separated and founded a new group due to disagreements over the political situation of the country. This was a great chance to study a division from the two sides, so my sample increased to nine, to include this new group.

Coming into the final stage of my fieldwork (2013-2014) I decided to center on four of these organizations, following the same criteria. I centered on three districts of the greater Buenos Aires, and looked for a particular type of organization in each. For district one, I chose a small radical anti-government organization. For district two, I chose a small moderate pro-government organization. And for district three, I chose a large anti-government organization. In addition, I added a fourth organization in district three, because it was the group from which the organization in district two had separated in 2011.

In addition, thanks to funding from the NSF, I was able to spend the final months of my fieldwork doing research on San Salvador de Jujuy. My goal was to incorporate

greater diversity in the experiences of activists in my sample, compensate for the tendency of studies on the piqueteros to focus on organizations from Buenos Aires, and set the stage for future research projects. I focused on three specific organizations. The first is one of the largest piquetero groups in the nation, something remarkable given that Jujuy is a relatively small province far away from the nation's capital. The second is a smaller group strongly opposed to the first, despite significant similarities. Finally, the third is the Jujuy branch of one of the organizations in district one. The three groups share a common origin in the protests by state employees in the 1990s, hence their contrasting trajectories are deeply interesting.

Access

When I first approached piquetero organizations, I expected some resistance and distrust. Consequently, I decided I would contact leaders and activists prior to any visit. I created a list with the emails and/or phone numbers of different public figures associated with each of the groups I wanted to study. The information came from two sources: a friend from college who lent me the phone numbers of some leaders he had interviewed years ago, as well as newsletters and official statements posted on the internet. About a month prior to my first trip, I sent emails to the contacts in my list describing my study, and asking for authorization to participate in the events of the organization and interview some of its members. I did not expect many replies, and I was right (only a few wrote back). A week after, I started calling the people who had not responded to the email. The

results were very good: almost everyone I contacted said they had no problem with me doing research and visiting them.

For each organization I studied, I sought to develop a strong relation with an internal sponsor, that is, someone from the organization who trusts me and puts me in contact with other activists. I usually asked this informant if he or she could recommend people I could interview, and then, once introduced to that person, I asked him or her if she agreed to be interviewed, emphasizing that participation was voluntary. In some cases (especially in small organizations) the main leaders fulfilled the role of sponsor. But in bigger groups it usually was the case that after a short meeting with a national figure I was directed to someone of lower rank. That is why the majority of my informants ended up being neighborhood coordinators. For instance, take the case of Josefa. Shortly after arriving in Buenos Aires in mid-2011, I arranged to meet with the national leader of her organization at a coffee shop in downtown Buenos Aires. He arrived an hour and a half late and stayed for only five minutes. Nevertheless, he was accompanied by one of his aides, Luis, whom I interviewed. Luis invited me to go to an upcoming community service event, where he introduced me to many people from the district, among them Josefa, the organization's head for a specific neighborhood. She rapidly grew fond of me and became a great contact, inviting me to every event the group organized and introducing me to countless people.

Although I found much less resistance than expected, that does not mean I had no problems at all. In many of the groups I studied there were people who did not trust me, especially because I live in the United States. For example, one day I was going to a demonstration in a bus when a middle-aged activist told me, half-jokingly, "you must be a spy, you get information about us and then you take it up there". For a few seconds I did not know what to say, until I listed all the documents I had to carry when I travelled abroad and concluded in a jovial tone, saying "even if I wanted to sell them information, they would not trust me." The interesting thing is that this woman is a close friend of one of my main informants in that organization, another activist who invited me to her house, openly talked about her life (in our first interview she described a very traumatic episode), and never asked me for any proof of who I was. This incident showed me that having respected sponsors within an organization would not eliminate distrust completely.

Another problem was the potential for gatekeeping. My reliance on informants, plus the fact that I always asked for permission to participate in events, helped me generate trust with the organizations I studied. Nevertheless, that allowed them to exclude me from things they did not want me to see. However, I do not think this has been a major problem. First, it assumes that my informants actually wanted to hide things. Although most leaders may try to show their organization in the best light possible, they are unlikely to exclude an observer from everything. Second, even if they tried to do so, my experiences in the field suggest that it is hard to do. Even in those cases where my

informants portrayed an idealized picture of their organizations, the people they recommended to me for interviewing were open about negative aspects. Many times I witnessed fights, and only once I was asked to leave. Most times people laughed at me, saying, "you see, this is a *quilombo* (mess)". Other times I was encouraged to stay. As the leader of one group said to others, referring to me in my presence: "he has to learn about our good parts, and about our problems too".

Only once, though, I lost access to a fieldsite. It took place as I was nearing the end of my fieldwork in Buenos Aires, and it occurred unexpectedly. I was convinced I had an excellent rapport with the members of the group, but one morning, as I asked them if they knew people who had left the organization, one of the leaders suddenly told me that he no longer trusted me. Many of my behaviors that I thought conveyed respect were interpreted as suspicious, perhaps I was spying on them? For instance, I always called before visiting their building, to make sure I was not interfering with any activity. However, what I intended as a polite act was interpreted as an attempt at gathering information.

I never knew if other members of the group shared this person's views. He suggested having a general meeting to decide whether I would still be granted access to the organization's events, but when I tried to call them to arrange that, I received no response. I decided to respect what seemed to be reluctance to meet me, and not insist.

Given that I worked with very different organizations, that have strong differences between them, I always knew that losing access to some was probable, especially given that my fieldwork extended over a period of several years. However, cutting links to a group that I honestly liked and cared about was more painful than I had envisioned. In the following weeks I tried to make sense of such an abrupt change: What had I missed? I remembered events occurring over the years that seemed minor at the time, such as when in a meeting someone described the profile of a typical undercover cop, which seemed to fit me very well. To this day, I am still unsure what caused the loss of access. Perhaps I had unwittingly offended someone in the group? But the relations were very cordial until then. Maybe there was some group dynamic or shameful fact that I was unaware of? I would be surprised any of this that happened, because the group had been very open to me until then.

After much thinking, I concluded that the probable explanation was a combination of all of the above. From my perspective, the organization was a group of very honest people going through hard times. In the past few years many members had been arrested after a protest, the group had gone through a succession of bitter divisions, and despite their best intentions their conflicts with the community had intensified. In that context, perhaps my behavior arouse suspicions, and what for a long time was perceived as innocent interest became progressively seen as treacherous.

Regardless of the reasons for it, this specific incident was a painful reminder of the ethical and practical issues involved in the work of an ethnographer. Engaging with the field, "being there in the neighborhood" like many of my respondents said, allowed me to learn about the experiences of hundreds of people who struggle each day to give their families a better future. At the same time, it showed me the dilemmas and complexities which are inherent to any human being. I believe that portraying my respondents as heroes would be not only inaccurate, but also patronizing. Losing access to a group of nice people reminded me what my research was about: surpassing the debate of whether the piqueteros are evil or moral, and understand them as individuals inserted in a specific context, with a particular history, and with certain motivations. In sum, my respondents are much more than a category or a set of behaviors: they are complete persons.

Researcher Role

Covering organizations with different perspectives and trajectories was essential to my project, yet it confronted me with a dilemma. Over the years I did research on eleven different organizations with various trajectories and ideologies. How could I adopt a role that elicits openness and cooperation, while at the same time being seen as a "neutral" observer? I needed my respondents to trust me and be open to me, but at the same time I wanted them to understand that I was working with different groups. My problem, therefore, was to find a balance between insiderness and outsiderness.

I sought to maintain this balance by adopting a particular role, one I call "allied sociologist". I presented myself as a scholar who is sympathetic with the struggle of the piquetero movement as a whole, regardless of conflicts between organizations, and who wants to study the transformations that have taken place in the movement after the peak of mobilization in 2001-2002. I emphasized my belief in the importance of poor people's movements for Argentinean society. Just as artists, social workers and lawyers usually participate in these organizations without being members, I portrayed myself as an ally rather than an activist, an *amigo de la casa* ("friend of this place") instead of a *compañero* (fellow activist). And I made clear from the beginning that I was working with several different organizations. If asked, I always said the list of other groups I had contacted.

Achieving the intended balance was a difficult task. On the one hand, it happened frequently that my respondents began to see me more as an activist than a sociologist. I was sharing time with them, and participating in events with enthusiasm. That led to being called a *compañero* in several occasions, especially as fieldwork progressed. I had been present over the years and showed a lot of interest in the struggle of the organization; why would I not be treated like an member? Even more, in Argentina the boundaries between sociologist and activist are blurry, because academics are expected to be active participants in politics. In addition, semantics complicated my role even further. In Argentinean Spanish, many words used to describe a likeable and trustworthy person

are the same to express common political allegiance. For instance, the word *cumpa* (friend, buddy) is short for *compañero* (Fellow).

On the other hand, there were times when the opposite problem happened: I was perceived as an outsider, not because of lack of trust, but largely because of the way I look. To my surprise, some people thought I was not Argentinean. Firstly, these groups are accustomed to people who come from developed countries to visit the movement. As a tall, "white-looking" Argentinean that came from the United States to do research, I was occasionally confused for an American. Secondly, even when people knew I am Argentinean, when asked about where I was staying, they assumed it was *Capital*, that is, downtown Buenos Aires, a much richer area where the largest universities are located. As a result of both confusions, I frequently had to clarify that not only am I Argentinean, but that I was born and lived for 25 years in the Greater Buenos Aires. This is not a minor thing. Coming from the *Conurbano* (the outskirts of the metropolitan area) is very different as being a *Porteño* (from the city itself). There is considerable discrimination against the former, and as a result, a lot of resentment towards the latter.

In sum, I made constant efforts to move from a role of *compañero* to one of "allied sociologist". This implied making sure my respondents understood that although I was sympathetic to their cause and enthusiastic about participating in demonstrations and events, I also did the same with other organizations, some of which were seen as rivals. In general, I was successful. There were even occasions when I was encouraged to go

talk to rival organizations. Of course, the merits for this situation lie mostly in the goodwill of my respondents, who were always trying to help me. However, there were a number of decisions I made during my fieldwork which helped me achieve the intended role. Firstly, I was always willing to do anything my respondents were doing at the time. I offered to help clean curbs, cook a meal, keep a fire alive, or carry loads. Most times the offer was welcomed. I never pretended this would eliminate all barriers between me and my subjects, but I wanted to avoid being seen as "someone from the Ministry" or "someone from a university who knows how to speak well", that is, specialized outsiders who come, see how everyone is working, but do not work themselves. Secondly, although the places I visited were usually either isolated or in tough neighborhoods, I got there by myself, using public transportation. Only a few times did I accept the offer of having an activist guide me to the closest bus stop or train station, and this was due to concrete safety concerns (such as a particularly dangerous place or a gang being in the area). The benefits of doing this were twofold. I demonstrated to my respondents that I was not a foreigner, because it is hard to move around the greater Buenos Aires without native knowledge of the transportation system; and I experienced by myself one of the main problems of these neighborhoods: their physical segregation due to very bad buses and trains. Thirdly, I pointed out that I have a history of participating in demonstrations since very young, although I never did it as part of an organization. Finally, although I shared the list of organizations I had contacted, I never gave the name of any interviewee. This was not only an IRB requirement; it was also a way of letting everyone know that people from other groups would not know about their personal participation.

Ethical considerations

Even though I received IRB approval for my fieldwork and followed its directives, some of the main ethical dilemmas I faced exceed the requirements of this office. Three of them have been particularly important.

The first one refers to voluntariness. Every time I introduced myself and prior to all my interviews, I made clear that participation was absolutely voluntary. However, since many times local leaders encouraged people to talk to me, I do not know if those who granted me interviews did so only because they wanted to please my sponsor. I tried to counterbalance this by emphasizing that the respondent could refuse to participate at any moment, but it is hard to know if this was effective.

The second dilemma relates to my results. What if I find something that can be held against the organizations I study? More in general, what if my conclusions are used to delegitimize the piquetero movement? For example, one of my findings is that people frequently perceive these organizations as part of traditional patronage networks linked to local political parties (see Auyero, 2001; Quiros, 2006). Although I interpret this as a rather positive thing (it is a sign that the piqueteros are effective problem-solvers), someone might use it to reinforce negative media stereotypes of the movement.

The third dilemma is what Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez (2011) calls "the maquiladora syndrome", that is, the dynamic by which researchers from developed nations visit a third world country, extract information about the experiences of poor people, return to their universities, and use that data to advance their academic careers. I became aware of this problem during a demonstration. When I asked an activist if I could participate in events of his organization, he said yes, but with one condition: that I share the results with the group. He complained that many scholars had visited them, taking advantage of the cultural capital accumulated by the people who had participated in the movement. The phrase he used was eloquent: "we did not block roads for years so people like you can do your job". Thus, I plan to share the results of my dissertation by organizing workshops with any organization that is interested. I have already done one presentation in 2014, and the results were very favorable.

Accuracy

I kept record of my work by writing detailed fieldnotes. Following the advice of Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), I did not aim to do an "objective" account of facts, but rather sought to write a detailed story of what I had seen, experienced and done during the day. As these authors emphasize, writing fieldnotes is a process of interpretation and sense making, in which "findings" cannot be separated from the way they are observed and documented. Consequently, I included my actions, perceptions and feelings in the notes.

Surprisingly for me, writing these notes was the most demanding part of the research. I would return from a whole day of work and have to find the energy to sit down and write in a computer for hours. Most the time I could not skip this work, because the next morning I would have to leave early for another day of participant observation. This made fieldwork exhausting. I used Sundays (and the few occasions when an event got cancelled) to review the notes from the past week and make addenda, ensuring I was not missing any important component.

Funding and research support

Funding an extensive ethnographic project is always a challenge. Thankfully, I was able to combine fellowships from UT, direct support from faculty members, and a doctoral dissertation grant from the National Science Foundation, to cover the costs of my research.

The funding for the first three phases of fieldwork was similar: a mix of personal savings and summer fellowships from the Department of Sociology and the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at UT. Given that the funding received was not enough to cover the expenses of research, the availability of free housing was essential. I was able to stay rent-free at relatives' houses. However, this solution was only available

for short periods of time, hence during the last stage of my research (a year starting in December of 2013) the costs of fieldwork were higher.

My original plan for the last stage of my fieldwork called for six months of research in Buenos Aires, from December 2013 to June 2014. However, in January of 2014 I was awarded an NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant. As a result, I was able to spend more time in Buenos Aires and extend my research to San Salvador de Jujuy.

In both sites I benefited from the logistical support of scholars. I was a visiting researcher (*investigador invitado*) at the Gino Germani Social Science Research Institute at the University of Buenos Aires. I also received office space and computer access from the School of Humanities at the National University of Jujuy.

Beyond logistical issues, none of this research would have been possible without the help of hundreds of activists in the piquetero movement, who from the very beginning of my project were exceedingly supportive. People who did not mind spending hours telling me their personal histories, shared powerful memories, and invited me into their homes, their work, and their struggle. My gratitude to them cannot be put into words effectively, and my admiration for their efforts knows no limits.

Appendix B – Data on Respondents

Table 1 - List of Respondents

Pseudonym	Gender	Age[32]	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?[33]	Date(s) of interview(s)
Julia Saldias	F	70s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	1994	No	7/13/2011
Ernesto Gonzalez	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1995	No	7/13/2011
Gustavo Aragon	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/16/2011
Laura	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/18/2011
Julio	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/18/2011
Alberto	M	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005	No	7/20/2011
Armando	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/20/2011
Graciela	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	7/20/2011
Abelardo	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/20/2011
Carlos Tiburno	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/20/2011
Cristian	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	Unknown	No	7/21/2011
Rodriguez	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/21/2011
Juan Carlos	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/21/2011

[32] At the time of the first interview.
[33] At the time of the last interview.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Tito	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	7/25/2011 - 5/14/2012
Clarisa	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2004	No	7/25/2011
Roberto	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2002	No	7/26/2011
Luis	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Uruguay	2004	No	7/26/2011
Mario Rodriguez	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/28/2011
Silvio	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010s	No	7/28/2011
Anabella	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	7/28/2011
Constanza	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/28/2011 - 5/17/2012
Alan	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2008	No	7/28/2011 - 4/11/2014
Patricia	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005-2006	No	7/28/2011
Claudia Pedraza	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	7/30/2011 - 1/22/2014 - 1/27/2014
Angelina Ramirez	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005-2006	No	7/30/2011 - 2/19/2014 - 2/21/2014
Tita	F	70s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	2003	Yes	7/30/2011 - 3/11/2014
Josefa	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2007	No	7/30/2011
Analia	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005	No	7/30/2011 - 1/9/2014 - 7/15/2014
Mariana	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	7/30/2011
Leila	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	7/30/2011
Bautista	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2004	No	8/5/2011 - 6/14/2013

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Lourdes Correa	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	8/6/2011 - 4/24/2014
Osvaldo Capelli	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	8/9/2011
Arnaldo Iturralde	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1995	No	8/9/2011
Facundo	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	5/15/2012
Julio	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2002	No	5/16/2012
Brian	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2002	No	5/16/2012
Paula	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2011	No	5/17/2012
Oscar	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2012	No	5/17/2012
Gisela	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	5/17/2012 - 6/9/2013
Juliana	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	5/18/2012
Lucia	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2007	No	5/18/2012
Hortencia	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	5/19/2012
Pablo	M	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	Unknown	No	5/19/2012
Aurora Palacios	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2004	No	5/19/2012 - 5/29/2012
Paola	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	5/22/2012
Ernestina	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	5/25/2012
Arnaldo Miguez	M	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	5/25/2012
Belen Portales	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	5/28/2012

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Evangelina	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	5/28/2012
Luciana	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	5/28/2012
Sergio	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2008	No	6/1/2012
Ines	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1999	No	6/1/2012
Jonathan	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	6/1/2012
Fernanda	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Bolivia	2002	No	6/1/2012 - 6/6/2013
Norma	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1993	No	6/1/2012 - 1/15/2014 - 4/1/2014
Antonio	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2011	No	6/4/2012
Federica	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1998	No	6/6/2012
Simon	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2007	No	6/6/2012
Lia Nocca	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	6/6/2012
Diego Navarro	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Uruguay	1990s	No	6/9/2012
Ivan	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005	No	6/9/2012
Nestor Pozos	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2009	Yes	6/11/2012
Luisa	M	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	6/12/2012
Virginia	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1999	No	6/14/2012
Iliana	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2009	No	6/14/2012
Gloria	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	1999	No	6/14/2012

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Estela	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	6/26/2012
Carmen	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	6/26/2012
Oscar	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	6/26/2012
Luis	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2009	Yes	5/13/2013 - 6/27/2013
Esrnesto Fanela	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	Yes	5/17/2013 - 6/20/2013 - 6/6/2014
Victor	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2009	No	5/21/2013
Fabian	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	5/23/2013 - 6/5/2013 - 6/25/2013
Carolina	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	5/24/2013
Lucila	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2005	No	5/24/2013 - 6/3/2013
Pilar	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	6/9/2013 - 6/27/2013
Guadalupe	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Uruguay	1994	No	6/13/2013
Anibal	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	6/13/2013
Oscar	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2007	Yes	6/13/2013
Lionel	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2006	No	6/19/2013 - 6/21/2013
Kevin	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2008	No	6/19/2013 - 6/27/2013
Melina	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	6/20/2013
Celeste	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	6/26/2013

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Milagros	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	1/2/2014 - 3/10/2014
Paloma	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	1/13/2014 - 3/14/2014
Olivia	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1999	No	1/15/2014
Renata	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1994	No	1/20/2014
Violeta	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2012	No	1/23/2014 - 1/30/2014
Aldana	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	2/12/2014
Brisa	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1997	No	2/13/2014
Vanesa	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	2/13/2014 - 2/18/2014
Valentina	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	2/14/2014
Sol	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2012-2013	Yes	2/21/2014
Jazmin	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2010	No	2/25/2014 - 5/26/2014
Alejandro	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	2/26/2014 - 7/15/2014
Giugliana	F	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	2/26/2014
Tatiana	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	2/27/2014 - 3/10/2014
Pilar	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	Yes	3/12/2014
Axel	M	30s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2004	Yes	3/26/2014 - 3/31/2014
Ezequiel	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	3/28/2014
Malena	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2013	No	4/3/2014

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Mauro	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	4/21/2014 - 5/5/2014
Camila	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2009	Yes	4/24/2014 - 4/25/2014
Lara	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2014	Yes	4/25/2014
Fabricio	M	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2006	Yes	4/29/2014
Macarena	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1997	No	5/5/2014
Catalina	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1996	No	5/6/2014
Isabel	F	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	5/6/2014 - 6/9/2014
Priscila	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	2000s	No	5/19/2014
Jessica	F	20s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	5/19/2014
Mora	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000s	No	5/22/2014
Valentina	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2006	No	5/22/2014 - 7/15/2014
Brenda	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Peru	2011	No	5/22/2014
Alma	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2011	No	5/26/2014
Victoria	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1999	No	5/27/2014 - 6/10/2014
Sabrina	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2003	No	6/2/2014
Horacio	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	2013	No	6/6/2014
Juan Pablo	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	2000	Yes	6/7/2014
Clara	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Paraguay	2013	No	6/10/2014

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Enzo	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	Unknown	No	6/16/2014
Candela	F	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2000	No	6/16/2014
Elias	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	6/18/2014
Pedro	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2002	Yes	6/22/2014
Rocio	F	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2011	No	6/24/2014
Ornella	O	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2012	No	6/24/2014 - 7/8/2014
Mateo	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	6/27/2014
Nahuel	M	40s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	No	7/6/2014
Bianca	O	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2011-2012	No	7/8/2014
Antonella	F	70s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1999	No	7/23/2014
Gabriel	M	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	2001	No	7/23/2014
Dante	M	50s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1990s	Yes	7/24/2014
Soledad	F	60s	Buenos Aires	Argentina	1996	Yes	7/25/2014
Julieta	F	40s	Jujuy	Argentina	2003	No	9/26/2014 - 10/17/2014
Morena	F	50s	Jujuy	Argentina	2005-2006	No	9/29/2014
Beatriz	F	50s	Jujuy	Argentina	2003	No	9/29/2014 - 10/8/2014 - 10/17/2014
Alfonsina	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2003	No	9/29/2014
Jeremias	M	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2013	No	10/1/2014

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Metropolitan Area	National Origin	Beginning of participation	Dropout?	Date(s) of interview(s)
Ariel	M	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	1990s	No	10/2/2014
Valentino Saravia	M	50s	Jujuy	Argentina	1990s	No	10/4/2014 - 10/24/2014
Gimena	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2000-2001	No	10/9/2014
Noemi	F	50s	Jujuy	Bolivia	2002	No	10/18/2014
Abril	F	40s	Jujuy	Argentina	2010s	No	10/20/2014
Antonella	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2005	No	10/22/2014
Olivia	F	40s	Jujuy	Argentina	1999	No	10/22/2014
Zoe	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2000s	No	10/27/2014
Sara	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2004	No	10/30/2014
Amanda	F	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2003	No	11/6/2014
Isidora	F	50s	Jujuy	Argentina	2000s	No	11/6/2014
Irene	F	40s	Jujuy	Argentina	2000	No	11/10/2014
Mariano	M	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2010	No	11/11/2014
Santino	M	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2000	No	11/17/2014
Ramiro	M	30s	Jujuy	Argentina	2001	No	11/18/2014

Table 2 - Respondents by Age

Age group	Number of respondents
20s	24
30s	23
40s	32
50s	46
60s	20
70s	8

Table 3 - Respondents by National Origin

Country of Birth	Number of respondents
Argentina	140
Bolivia	2
Paraguay	7
Peru	1
Uruguay	3

Table 4 - Respondents by beginning of participation

Year of recruitment	Number of respondents
1990s	40
2000s	83
2010s	27
Unknown/unclear	3

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